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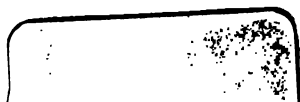
OBJECTIONS
TO THE
METHODIST CLASS-MEETING

JOHN BATE.

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OBJECTIONS

TO THE

METHODIST CLASS-MEETING

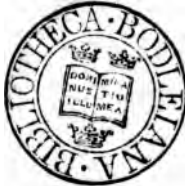
ANSWERED.

A BOOK FOR HEARERS AND MEMBERS.

BY

JOHN BATE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CLASS-LEADER'S ASSISTANT," &c.



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PREFACE.

THE following little work is not written with the view of eliciting controversy within or without Methodism : this is farthest from the author's intention, and he has endeavoured to keep it as far from his spirit and language.

In writing in defence and support of the Class-meeting, the author feels that he is writing for something more than a form or ceremony in Methodism ; for something that is associated with her history, her life, her growth, her strength, and her purity : for a *scriptural means of grace*. Form, or ceremony, which neither contained life, nor could give life, were not worth so much ink and paper. A man may dispose of an ornament from his person, and be none the less a man, and none the less qualified to meet his duties and obligations in life ; but if he lost his right arm, he would not only lose an ornament, but one of the most useful members of his body, which would materially disable him in the toils of life. So a church may dispense with some of her forms, and be equally efficient in life before God and labour among men ; but should it suffer one of its life-giving, life-sustaining, and life-spreading means to languish and expire, it sustains a loss which is irreparable. The Class-meeting in Methodism may be regarded as more than a limb on the body,—as her *heart* ; and to lose this would be, in a sense, fatal to her. She could better afford to lose her mere forms, ceremonies, ornaments, whatever they might be, than her heart. Without those she could survive and do her work ; but without *this*, though she may maintain an existence, she would be essentially void of life, labour, and usefulness.

The importance which the author attaches to the Class-meeting, must be his apology, if any is needed, for many of the sentiments which are contained in his book.

In taking the position he does in regard to the Class-meeting being a form of Christian communion, making church-membership more complete, more scriptural, and more useful, he hopes that bigotry will not be attributed to him, either in spirit or in writing. While he writes thus of membership in the Methodist church, he is far from thinking that all membership in other churches is unscriptural ; just as he would be from ignoring the citizenship of a German, because it somewhat differed from his own as an Englishman.

He believes the true theory of the churches, in many respects,

to be analogous to that of the nations. As it would be absurd for England to declare itself the whole world, so it would for any church to set itself up as the only one church in the earth. There are many races and nations constituting the one human family, which descended from the one federal head, of whom God was the Creator; so there are many sections and names of churches which comprise and constitute the one universal church of the Redeemer, that originated in one church at the beginning, of which Jesus Christ was the Founder. The laws, manners, and customs of nations do not identify them with the body of humanity in the world: these are peculiarities arising out of their organizations as distinct nationalities: no more do the rites, ceremonies, ritualisms, and such like, connect a church with that body of believers of which Christ is the Head: these are the results of human organization and ecclesiastical government. The body is of Christ; and just as much of Christ as there is in the *sectional* member, is it united to the body. The *clothing* is of man, and does not make the body or unite any member to it; the body is of God, and only He by His creative energy can bring bone to bone, sinew to sinew, and make the many members *one living body*. The fact that we as a people are born in England gives us our name as English people; and our training in England according to its laws, customs, dialects, gives us the national peculiarities which are common to the English, and which distinguish us from other nations of earth's peoples: so the fact of being born of parents belonging to any one section of a church gives us, in a religious point of view, the name of that section; and being trained therein, according to its doctrines, modes of worship, form of membership, gives us those external peculiarities associated therewith, and which distinguish us from all other sections. One nation may, if it choose, (what other nation has a right to prevent?) glory in its laws, customs, institutions, as superior to those of another; but let it not in its glorying ignore the good laws, customs, and institutions which other nations may possess. In doing this, it might not only irritate them, but expose its weakness to ridicule, pity, or contempt. So, if one church glory, let it exercise the same precaution in regard to other churches. God has made of one blood all people for to dwell upon the earth, though dwelling in such a variety of climes and countries; though speaking such a multiplicity of languages; though wearing such diversified

costumes; though existing in such different grades of civilization: so He has made *all Christians* of one nature, through faith in the one blessed Saviour, though in their *ecclesiastical* relations, manners, appearances, localities, there may be as great disparities as in those things of nations to which reference has been made. As between nations barriers are falling, distances lessening, amity and human brotherhood strengthening,—so should it be among the churches. If nations never can be one in language, in customs, in institutions, in laws, they can, and are, becoming one in human feelings, in commercial co-operation, in reciprocity of trade, in social and brotherly intercourse, —things these which more concern the welfare of humanity than those. So, if churches cannot meet together (as can scarcely be expected in this world) in their *denominational* languages, usages, and regulations, let them meet more closely in the brotherly affections, in the heart-oneness, in the Spirit-indited prayers, in the earnest laboriousness to spread saving truths, in the common sympathy with Christ and with souls, which the undivided religion of the God-Man inspires; things these which are infinitely more important than they, and which ought, in their importance, ever to stand out before and above them; just as when two nations, engaged to support each other's honour and safety against a common foe, allow their national *little things* to be kept in subjection to the *grand unity* in the mighty things by which they aim at the achievement of glorious victory.

The author would commend this book to God for His blessing, that it may answer the end for which it has been written; viz., to remove prejudice, to dissipate ignorance, and to excite love in regard to the Methodist Class-meeting; to make this form of Christian fellowship to be seen and felt more scriptural, more obligatory, more advantageous, and more attractive; to bring, if possible, the Methodist people and ministry to abide by the old rule, and mind the same thing as their fathers and forefathers, and primitive Christians before them; not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some; but consider one another, and provoke one another to love and good works; and so MUCH THE MORE as they see the day approaching.

Here is the object. May God bless the means used to bring it about!

Dorking, November, 1865.

J. B.

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OBJECTIONS

TO THE

METHODIST CLASS-MEETING.

OBJECTION I.

**"YOU HAVE NO SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY FOR THE
CLASS-MEETING."**

THIS is a grave and important objection. Could it be sustained with the same ease and readiness with which it is sometimes made, Methodists would have to look about for the defences of their time-honoured institution. However, I think there need be little alarm as to the strength of the objection and the weakness of our cause. It may be well for the strengthening of our own faith, as for the refutation of the objection, to give this matter as much consideration as our space will allow. Let us aim at the mark before us in steady and cautious steps.

I. The first step is, that the Scriptures patronize and encourage the promotion of holiness in man. If this were not the case, they would deny themselves, and frustrate their own object. In all their details of doctrine, precept, example, promise, they contemplate man's holiness. The spirit pos-

sessed by every writer, and which whispers in the ears of every one who reads his particular book, is, "These things write I unto you that ye **SIN NOT.**"

The Class-meeting, in its spirit, aim, and use, seeks to promote the holiness of man. In this, therefore, it agrees with the Scriptures, and the Scriptures with it.

II. The Scriptures reveal certain means which have been provided by God for the promotion of man's holiness. The first class of these means is such as is peculiar to God Himself in their use and efficiency for the object stated,—means which, as they were above man's providing, so they are above his use. There is also another class of means which He has appointed, to which the submission of man is required, and with the use of which man's co-operation is necessary, in order that he might be made a partaker of the blessings that He has promised to convey through them; as, for instance, faith, prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, &c.

But while God, in the Scriptures, has revealed the above kind of means, it is far from being evident, according to the Scriptures, that He restricts and binds man to these and *no other in any form or kind*. In the providing of means for the promotion of his holiness, God has considered man's free agency, conscientiousness, responsibility, reason, circumstances, age, and associations. In view of these, He has allowed man to add to His means such means of his own as may, in his godly judgment, assist him in using the Divine; providing, however, that such added means do not, in their spirit and action, relax, oppose, or in any way tend to frustrate the Divine.

If, then, we look upon the Class-meeting as only originating in man, and having no positive institution from God; yet, as it is found not to oppose any of the Divine means in promoting the holiness of man, but rather to concur with them and to facilitate their use, it may be regarded as having a scriptural authority and sanction to support it.

III. The next step I shall make is much allied to the former, viz., that the Scriptures, in none of their doctrines, precepts,

means, injunctions, examples, or institutions, stand against the Class-meeting ; so that, in this particular, we have no disapproval. This form of Christian fellowship may be used without the word of God making us afraid by its rebukes, warnings, or denunciations.

IV. Suppose the Class-meeting to have no more scriptural authority than may arise from the preceding considerations, is it therefore to be set aside or objected to? In the same way, how many means, agencies, forms, ceremonies, creeds, &c., of some sections of the church would have to be abolished, until, perhaps, the sections were broken up, and scarcely a relic left to identify them with the scriptural church, according to the application of the principle now before us? It may be that our objector even would find himself surrounded with ecclesiastical desolation.

V. The next position which I would take is, that the Class-meeting, as a means of grace in the church of Christ, has as much scriptural authority as many other means which are used by the churches, and by Christians in their private and social relations of life, without any doubt being entertained as to their scripturalness. On what scriptural authority, I would ask, does private prayer rest? The answer is such as must be given by any one who reads his Bible, viz., "On the words of Christ: 'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly;'" also upon the examples of Christ and His apostles." On what scriptural authority does the preaching of the Gospel rest? On the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Is there any scriptural authority for public worship, for Prayer-meetings, for family devotion, for Missionary Societies, and similar means of doing good? Our objector, doubtless, would answer in all assurance, "Yes." We say he is right in answering thus. As is the authority for such means as here specified, so is the authority for the Class-meeting: it rests on the teachings and examples of Scripture.

"But where is your evidence?" It is here:—*First*, from the prophet Malachi, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." "But this was a *Jewish* practice," says the objector. True; but it was the practice of goodness in good people, and goodness is justifiably imitable anywhere and at all times. Meeting together for public prayer, singing, hearing the Scriptures read, was a Jewish practice. Must not we, therefore, assemble ourselves together for the public service of God? *Secondly*, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." (James v. 16.) *Thirdly*, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful who hath promised. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." (Heb. x. 24, 25.) *Fourthly*, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." (1 Thess. v. 11.) *Fifthly*, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. v. 19.) *Sixthly*, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord." (Col. iii. 16.) *Seventhly*, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. iii. 13.) *Eighthly*, "For I long to see you, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." (Rom. i. 11, 12.) *Ninthly*, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." (1 John i. 3.)

Here, then, are at least nine distinct passages of Scripture which authorize such a means of grace as the Class-meeting. No one who *knows* the nature of the Class-meeting, and properly

interprets these passages, will question this for a moment. It would have been almost impossible for any Methodist to have put together terms and phrases descriptive of the Class-meeting more emphatic than those which are contained in the afore-cited verses. "Speaking one to another;" "exhorting one another;" "provoking to love and good works;" "confessing faults one to another, and praying one for another;" "edifying one another;" "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns," &c. How were it possible to describe more exactly the nature and object of the Methodist Class-meeting? Let the reader consider the above quotations; and then other passages which favour Prayer-meetings, public worship, the Lord's Supper, &c.: let him make two columns of them, and then in all candour and fidelity pronounce whether there is not *as much* scriptural authority for the one as the other. I will not say, more for the one than the other, though that may not be impossible.

It has been assumed that the above passages would not be interpreted as referring to the public worship of indiscriminate characters, because the class of persons to whom they are addressed, with the particulars specifying the kind of meetings to be held by them, necessarily preclude any such interpretation being given.

Just glance for a moment at the occasion and reason for the above prescribed means of grace, and see how they agree with the Methodist Class-meeting in this regard. The Thessalonians, the Ephesians, the Colossians, (mark, there are passages of this description in each Epistle of Paul to the churches of his founding,) and general Christians to whom James and John wrote, had recently been converted from Judaism or Gentilism to Christianity; converted not merely in the form, but the power. The apostles, through whose instrumentality they had embraced the saving faith of Christ, were solicitous that they should be faithful in the maintenance of their religion in all its inner and outer power and loveliness. Now, in order to the attainment of this object, they prescribe the means referred to in the

selections we have made from their writings. And be it observed, the passages are far from exhausted. I ask any one who understands the history, the nature, the spirit, the design, and the results of the Class-meeting, whether there is not here as perfect an analogy as there can be between things ancient and modern?

But our objector may say that the above passages say nothing of the Class-meeting by name. True; it is not for a *name* that I am contending. That is a mere circumstantial or accidental thing, and could well be substituted by any other which would accord with the means itself. Perhaps you believe in the Trinity? But that name is not in the Bible. In the Liturgy? Is that in the Bible? In Missionary Societies, Sunday-schools, archbishops, deans, archdeacons? Are they in the Bible?

Our objector may still be tenacious, and again say, "But the *manner* of holding your Class-meeting does not exactly correspond with the manner of holding the means to which the verses before quoted refer." We have just now adverted to this, and shown that the manner is as parallel as it is possible for two things, one of ancient and one of modern date, to be. But even this is not the point we are aiming to establish. If the parallel in regard to the occasion, to the nature, to the spirit, and to the results, is established, the point aimed at is reached. Who doubts whether this is the same earth that our ancestors ages back lived upon, because it is a little changed in its surface? Who doubts whether we have the same Bible as Wycliffe had, because it is so changed in its type, paper, spelling, binding, &c.? Who doubts whether the same Gospel is preached now as was preached by Wesley, Luther, Calvin, the apostles, because the way of sermonizing, is so much altered? Who would venture to affirm that *our* methods of private prayer, family worship, public devotions, are the same as those who in Scripture are said to have observed these things? Must we therefore say that our observance of them is not scriptural? The fact is, that the Scriptures, in the specification of

religious means and duties, draw out no *invariable* plan by which they shall be carried out in all ages and places, and by all persons. They enjoin secret prayer, but do not say whether we are to pray long or short. They require an observance of the Lord's Supper, but state no fixed way of receiving it. They recognise the public assembling of the indiscriminate multitude for Divine worship and preaching of the word; but do not prescribe the particulars of worship, nor the method of preaching. It is true that in the means now in question they do specify what is to be done,—“exhorting,” “edifying one another,” “singing psalms,” &c. ; but they do not say how this exhortation is to be given, how the edifying is to be carried on, what psalms, spiritual songs, and hymns are to be sung. All these things, which are subordinate to the spirit, &c., are left to the times, circumstances, ages, and other considerations, as they may arise among the several churches which should adopt the means. The Methodist Class-meeting contains the essential features of the means recommended by the apostles, and in some respects the identical parts; and in these it conforms to the requirements of the Scriptures, and is therefore scriptural.

Not only are there the *teachings* of Scripture to authorize the Class-meeting, but *examples* also. *First*, the saints of the Jewish church furnish one, as given in way of history in the book of Malachi. *Secondly*, the blessed Redeemer and His disciples often communed with each other in the things of God. *Thirdly*, the primitive Christians abode steadfast in the apostles' *fellowship*, as well as in doctrine, breaking of bread, and prayers. *Fourthly*, the Thessalonian believers: “Wherefore comfort yourselves TOGETHER, and edify one another, EVEN AS ALSO YE DO.” (1 Thess. v. 11.)

After thus looking at the subject, I now propound the question, Whether there is not as much authority from the word of God for the Class-meeting as a means of grace, as for any other means which is held in the church of Christ?

Having disposed of the objection, there is another ground,

besides that of the Scripture, from which I would view the Class-meeting; and I cannot do better than take the view in this place. Is there any thing in the Class-meeting contrary to reason, to religion, to social order, to moral living, to peaceful and loyal citizenship, to the unity and concord of churches, to the general spread of Christianity in the world?

Again, let us glance at the development of the social principle in life apart from religion, and see how the Class-meeting is in striking analogy with it. I limit myself now to life among men. Take commercial men: have not they their meetings on the exchange, in the market, in the street, in the hotel; at different times, made up of a variety of persons, with frequently a *leading* mind among them? What do they meet for? They meet as commercial men, to speak one to the other about matters pertaining to commerce:—with a view to promote their individual and mutual interests in the things of this world. Who blames them for this? Who calls their judgment in question for doing thus? Is it not the natural effect of their calling? What would become of commerce as a whole, and how would their individual affairs succeed if no such meetings ever took place? Look among tradesmen, and you see the same principle developed in similar ways. Look among political men, artistic men, scientific men, literary men, philosophical men, in a word, any kind of men, where mutual dependence is felt, and individual interest is concerned, and the general good is contemplated in the mutual and individual,—and you see the exact idea of such means as we have been speaking of, carried out. Yes, and even if you look at men as *sinners*, aside from their respective callings in life, you see the same thing practised. As various as are the grades and classes of sinners, so various are their meetings in ways, times, and places, with the object of developing their sinful nature, and helping one another in their sinful ways. And knowing the immense gain arising from these meetings to iniquity and woe in the world, the prince of darkness is ever employing his own skill and that of his agents, for the

purpose of augmenting and changing them, that their interest may be sustained, and their existence not cease. No one can read the daily papers, or make observations as he walks through the streets of any town, city, or village, without seeing the sad evidences that sinners meet together as sinners, for their mutual edification in the principles and practice of sin. They meet from the two or three up to the two or three score. They have their private social meetings, and their public meetings. They meet daily, nightly, weekly, monthly. What regularity in meeting! How zealous, interested, united, in meeting! What sacrifices of time, money, personal and family comfort, they make to attend them! At what risk from the law they often meet! What woes, distresses, lamentations, murders, thefts, rebellions, frequently result from their meetings! If such meetings were *not* held, were it possible for sin to unfold itself in such gigantic proportions as it does? in such ever-varying phases? in such sweeping ravages? in such accelerating power?

I would now make an application of these thoughts; and I pray that every one who objects to the Class-meeting as a means of grace, whether Methodist or otherwise, might feel its true force. If every kind of men composing what may be called the secular world, think it necessary to meet together in the ways and for the purposes, as stated just now, shall *Christian* men as such think it unnecessary to do what is similar, with a view to help each other in religion, and to help the general interests of Christianity in the earth? Shall we admit that it is a principle in commerce, &c., thus to bring men together, and that Christianity has no such principle? that the secular affairs of life require these meetings, but that the highest matters of man's well-being do not require them? If objects, such as those of trade and commerce, by which money is obtained, towards which man has a natural inclination, cannot be sustained without meeting together, how can it be expected that other objects, towards which man is in himself averse, can be sustained without them? Shall we

confess that sin contains the social element, and developes it in the various ways alluded to, and deny that Christianity possesses as much, and leads its followers as strongly to means for its nourishment and extension? Shall men meet together to exhort one another in sin; to relate their experience in the vile deeds of iniquity; to form plans and make resolutions for further progress in these; to gamble, sing songs, &c.; and shall not Christians meet together to speak one to another of the fear of God, to sing spiritual songs, to confess their faults, to pray to be healed, to resolve upon better lives, to strengthen each other's hands in sympathy, love, zeal, holiness? Shall Satan's kingdom be built up and spread by such means as referred to, and the glorious kingdom of the Saviour languish and weaken for the want of them?

"But have we not the meeting together of Christians on the Sabbath day, and on the week evening, in public worship?" There are few churches but have these means. But are there not more means needed for other purposes, and to be conducted in a different way? Suppose commercial tradesmen had no other meetings than such as are analogous to the Sabbatic and week-night public services, would they be satisfied? would they think that they understood each other sufficiently; that they thereby acquired a sufficient insight into their business; that their knowledge was as distinct, minute, experimental, as it ought to be, for the interests of themselves and of the commercial world? Suppose ungodly men had no other meetings for the promotion of their sinful experience than those which are general and of a *public* character, how long would wickedness maintain its present vigour, growth, and influence? The fact is, that were these private social meetings to be neglected and given up, the interests of the secular and the wicked world, would soon get as far behind the church in enterprise and development, as the church is now behind the world in those respects, through the want of a more general, regular, zealous, and enthusiastic attention to such meetings as those which we have been considering in quotations from the Word of God.

May we not just here be reminded of the force and suitability of the Saviour's words? "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Considering the profession, the belief, the obligations, the responsibilities, the rewards, the honours, the Master, the Saviour, and the eternal destiny of Christians, the language ought to be reversed :—the children of light ought to be wiser in their generation than the children of this world.

OBJECTION II.

"THE CLASS-MEETING IS TOO MUCH LIKE THE ROMISH
CONFESSIONAL."

THIS objection in many circles has no small degree of influence ; and is often urged by some parties with considerable readiness and self-satisfaction. To say, however, that the Class-meeting resembles the Confessional either in appearance, nature, design, or effects, is to evince a simplicity of understanding, not to say a culpable ignorance, for which there can be found no justification in this age of Methodism, and with such abundant means of acquiring information.

To show the utter inapplicability of this objection to the Class-meeting, nothing more need be done than give a brief description of both the Class-meeting and the Confessional.

During a short residence in the city of Montreal, Canada, I visited one day St. Patrick's Roman Catholic church. This church, like the great Notre Dame cathedral of the same city, contains on either side confessional boxes at a distance of a few yards apart. Each box is about six feet six high, four or five feet wide, projecting forward about two feet ; divided into two apartments,—the one with a door and a seat for the priest ; the other open, with a bare stool, for the one

confessing to kneel upon. In the partition, high enough for the priest to put his ear to when sitting in his box, and low enough for the penitent to put his mouth to when kneeling in his, is a piece of lattice work about nine or ten inches square, through which the priest hears and the penitent speaks. Standing in the aisle of this church on the day referred to, looking on the various objects of interest, I saw a priest come stately and solemnly along the aisle in which I stood. Close to me was one of these confessional boxes, into which the priest entered, and fastened the door. A moment after I saw a woman enter the church; and, having sprinkled herself, bowed, and crossed, she came and entered the same box as the priest, only in the side appropriated to her. When they had been together some short time, the woman confessing, and the priest replying, in whispers which I heard, though not distinctly enough to understand the words; I finally heard the following, sufficiently clear to understand and to remember:—*Priest*.—"Now tell me, is there anything more you have to say?" *Woman*.—"Nothing more." *Priest*.—"Be sure you do not conceal anything." *Woman*.—"I do not." *Priest*.—"You have told me *all* your thoughts and feelings, have you?" *Woman*.—"Yes." The priest then came out of his box and left the church; the woman soon after following him.

I give this as a description of the Confessional, which came under my own observation. Of course there is much more might be said about it, in its nature, associations, and effects: but what I have said, will be enough to answer my purpose.

A Class-meeting is composed of a number of professing Christians, varying from three or six up to twenty or thirty. It is held once a week, on a day and hour, and in a place, which are most convenient to the majority of the members. One of the number is appointed to take charge of the Class, in the various things which belong to its interests. He is chosen to this because of qualifications which fit him for the office. He is called "the Leader," because he leads the meeting in the several parts of its religious exercises. The first part of

the exercises is to sing a hymn of praise to God ; the next is the offering of prayer by the Leader, or some one or more of the members. Then the Leader speaks to the members his present experience in the religious life, and afterwards calls upon each member to do the same ; to whom he replies, if necessary, in such words of counsel, comfort, admonition, warning, as the particular experience may require. Having thus spoken one to another about the things of God for thirty or forty minutes, a concluding hymn of praise is sung, and prayer offered, which brings the spiritual exercises to a close.

It may be proper to observe that, though such is the general method of holding Class-meetings, there is no *fixed legal way* obligatory. Each Leader, with the concurrence of the members, may introduce any variations which they may deem needful to the interest and profit of the meeting.

Taking the above descriptions of the Confessional and the Class-meeting as true, can any one with his eyes fairly open see the *least* resemblance between them? A *contrast* is at once obvious ; but a *comparison* is out of the question. It may as truthfully be affirmed that Popery and Protestantism are alike, as the Confessional and the Class-meeting.

If you consider the *place* of meeting, the *time* of meeting, the *person* in charge of the meeting, the *parties* who compose the meeting, the *method* of conducting the meeting, the *spirit* of the meeting, the *object* of the meeting, with every other possible phase of the Confessional or the Class-meeting, a palpable contrast strikes the honest and candid observer.

It may be said that the chief point of resemblance meant in the objection, is in the *confession*. But this fails in its application as much as any other. Take the instance just now mentioned, and the failure will be seen without difficulty. The priest and the woman were the only persons meeting. The woman was prostrated on her knees, confessing to the priest, in a most secret and profound manner. The priest urged the woman to give a full and unreserved disclosure of all her mind

to him ; and not until she had repeatedly told him she had nothing more to confess, would he be satisfied. Besides, the woman was limited to *confession*, and the priest acted as her absolver. Is there any thing like this in the Class-meeting ? The answer is, emphatically, No. A member of a Class-meeting sits in the presence of his fellow Christians, and *voluntarily* gives his experience in the religious life, in those features of it which he may think proper for the edification of others, and the relief of his own mind ; to whom responses are given, with a view of leading him to God through Christ, by the Holy Spirit ; to the Scriptures, to prayer, and to other Divine resources, for such blessings as he may need.

OBJECTION III.

"I WILL NOT MEET IN CLASS WHILE THERE ARE SO MANY INCONSISTENT MEMBERS ; I AM AS GOOD AS MOST OF THEM THAT DO MEET."

It may be admitted, without hesitancy or shame, that there is no *perfect* church under the sun ; and that even in Methodist Class-meetings there may be found those who have a name to live, but are dead ; who walk not as uprightly in the religious life as their profession would lead us to expect. It would be a new thing in the earth, if such were not the case. The Methodist church can no more be exempt from inconsistent members, than other churches.

It is no modern or novel thing for inconsistencies to belong to some of the members of the church of Christ. They were found in the Jewish church before the Messiah. Even among the few that followed the Redeemer Himself, were found a Peter who denied Him, a Thomas who doubted Him, and a

Judas who betrayed Him. Within the very precincts of Pente-costal influences, we find that the church contained two disciples who, for the love of filthy lucre, lied unto the Holy Ghost, and were overtaken with the judgments of the Lord. In the Corinthian and other apostolical churches, there were members whose improprieties of life called forth the severe censures and warnings of the apostles. But the apostles and Jesus Christ did not forsake the churches on these grounds. Can the history of the church, in all its length and breadth, present us with a single section, or a single age of its existence, in which it has been absolutely spotless in the lives of all its members? Nevertheless, God has never forsaken His Zion, because *all* her citizens have not worn undefiled garments. Are you better than God? Cannot you, my brother, go where He goes? Do you object to join a church or a meeting which He vouchsafes to honour with His presence?

You should not condemn *all* for one, two, or three; nor should you think evil of the good because of the bad. Peter's inconsistency did not make John inconsistent; nor did Judas's betrayal attach any guilt to James. You certainly would not conceive Barnabas to be any the worse Christian for the lying of Ananias and Sapphira. The few to whom you may refer as walking inconsistently, may be but a handful to the whole, and to include all would be, therefore, unjust and uncharitable; an inconsistency as great as that which you may see in them. Do you object to take any light from the sun, because he has his spots? Does the farmer forsake his land, because it yields him tares with his wheat?

You must consider, too, that possibly there is some good in the very persons to whom you advert as being inconsistent. They may fail in a few things, but succeed in the majority. In matters which most strike your eye, and which perhaps you are keen to perceive, they may come short of the mark; but in others, and it may be equally or more important, they are nothing wanting. You should, therefore, judge of them in their entirety of character, and not in their one-sidedness.

Weigh them as a whole in the scales of your justice. Do not take the alloy, and leave the genuine gold. Were you to do this, it may be that you would discern nothing more than might be expected of any individuals in their circumstances, with their temperaments and their associations.

In judging of the inconsistencies of Christians, it may be well to consider how far you are prepared to do so, by a knowledge of what constitutes consistency. Is your knowledge of Christian rectitude, clear, full, unprejudiced, unsectarian, scriptural? It may be that your standard of right is too high or too low; and were they to meet it, they might either become worse than they are, or ascend into a region too ethereal for such a world of flesh and sense as this.

It is possible that in the very things where you discern inconsistencies, others equally as wise, as good, as interested in the welfare of the church, see none at all. Which is right? Is it not likely that they are right and you wrong? It certainly is not a thing within the bounds of impossibility that you may see through a glass darkly, while they may see in the pure and unclouded light of faith and charity.

Inconsistencies are not peculiar to the members of a church. They attach themselves to *every* human being, and are impressed upon almost all things that man touches. It would be well for you to be faithful with yourself, and look into your own heart and life as into those of others. Ask, "Do not I, as a father, or as a husband, or as a son, or as a tradesman, or as a member of a club, make pretensions up to which I do not live? Am not I imperfect and deficient in many things in which I profess to be correct and upright? And if such be the case, am I not adding another inconsistency, by complaining of others when I am not perfect myself? Would I like others to keep out of my company because of failings which they see in my life, just as I object to join God's people because some of them do not live altogether as four-squared as I should like them? May not the old proverb be aptly applied to me,—'Physician, heal thyself?'"

The former part of the objection failing, you may fall back upon the latter,—“I am as good as those that do meet in Class.” Ah, my friend, perhaps this is nothing but the echo of the Pharisee cry of other days. Who is to be judge in this question? You justify yourself; does God justify you? You exalt yourself; does He exalt you? Do not forget what the Saviour says, “He that exalteth himself shall be abased.” The Pharisee thought himself much better than the publican; but God thought the publican much better than the Pharisee.

Not, however, to call in question the truthfulness of your statement, ought you to keep your goodness isolated? Should you hide your light under a bushel? Why live without the fellowship of others in goodness any more than without fellowship in trade, in commerce, in knowledge, and other things pertaining to this life? And, mark, if you are as good as they without their fellowship, how much better might you be with it! and if by its use you could attain to a higher excellence of character, how much more influence you might exert to raise them towards yourself in superior virtues and graces!

OBJECTION IV.

“CAN I NOT BE A MEMBER IN THE METHODIST CHURCH WITHOUT MEETING IN CLASS?”

THIS is a question of very grave and serious importance to the Methodist church at the present time. Never was it propounded so frequently and extensively as now. Not only among the laity, but also among the ministry, to some extent, is there a disposition to substitute something else for membership in the place of meeting in Class. “Why should the rule be universal in its application? Can it not be left to the choice of persons whether they meet in Class to be members, or

whether they be members on some other ground? Do not the history of Methodism, her present circumstances, the advanced state of her intelligence, wealth, and position among other churches, call for some modification of the form of her membership?"

These are something like the queries that are agitating the Methodist bodies on both sides of the Atlantic at the present period. I hope, therefore, to give the objection in all its bearings as just, liberal, scriptural, and full a consideration as my limited space will allow.

The question proposed implies on the part of him who raises it the recognition of Methodism as a section of the church of Jesus Christ. On this point, then, there is no need for any argument.

This principle being admitted, I would state, as the first thought for consideration, that Methodism as a church has the right to make such a law and regulation which requires meeting in Class as the form of membership within her. It is as much her right as it is the right of any other church to make the law of her membership; as much as it was the right of the church at Jerusalem, at Rome, at Corinth, at Ephesus, under the counsel and direction of the inspired apostles. The Methodist church possesses as much authority to do this as they; and it possesses the same counsels and directions of the same inspired apostles, by which to be guided in the exercise of that authority: why, therefore, should it not exercise its prerogative in making any particular law for its own membership, supposing the authority exercised and the law made to be in consistency with the counsels and teachings of the inspired apostles?

It must be observed that as the Methodist church does not regard itself the one *catholic* church, or consider itself to possess any authority over other churches, so it does not regard this law as having any obligation outside of its own pale.

In the particulars above mentioned Methodism stands in an analogical position to the English or French nation. That the English nation possesses the right to make its own laws, what

other nation calls in question? That she makes these laws for her own subjects, and those that may choose her as their home, is also plain enough, without regarding other nations as in any way bound to observe or adopt them.

And then, it must be remembered, that the Methodist church does not decide that conformity to this law constitutes a *Christian*, any more than conformity to the laws of a certain nation constitutes a man. There are well known principles, signs, evidences, which prove a man to belong to the human race, distinct from all national laws. These are *in* the man; are placed there by the Great Creator Himself; and he might have them, though he belonged to no organized nation. His conformity to a nation's laws of citizenship would be an *additional* evidence of his human character; would show that he was advanced beyond the rough, savage state of nature, and that he was a citizen of some one particular nation of earth's nations. Even so, no law of membership in any particular church necessarily, and in the abstract, makes a man a Christian, and unites him to the one body of Christians, of which Christ is the Head. This is settled and determined by certain elements and attributes which Christ Himself can alone give. If a man be *in* Christ, born again, he is a Christian, belonging to the true lineage and race of Christians throughout the world. His entrance into a church as a member according to its existing laws, may be an additional evidence of his Christian nature, and show that he wishes to stand identified with some one part of the universal visible church.

The law of citizenship in a nation is made in view either of the existing fact of a man being born a man and a citizen in that nation, or in view of a man as such wishing to become a citizen. So the law of membership in a church is made by a church in view of the existing fact of religion in a man, and his wish to enter into its fellowship with a design to retain it; or in view of such who desire religion, and wish to enjoy its privileges, in order to find and preserve it. The law, then, in question does not make a man a Christian, but only admits and

continues him a member in the church, with a view to develop, nourish, and strengthen his Christianity, which he is supposed in some measure to possess ; just as a nation's law of citizenship does not make a man a man, but provides for his admission and continuance as a citizen, that he might avail himself of certain national facilities for sustaining and improving his manhood, which he brings with him, for the purpose of serving his own interests, and the general weal of the people to whom he has given himself a citizen.

My next position is, that the law of membership made by the Methodist church is not in any way contrary to the nature of Christianity, to the interests of the Christian, to the well-being of any other church ; is not contrary to the general teachings of Scripture,—points these which should regulate every church in the laws, orders, means, and usages which it may establish.

If, then, the Methodist church possess the authority to make this law ; if this law is right, according to the principles just laid down ; and if you wish to become a member within her, you cannot legally do so without conforming to the law. More than this, if you admit the two propositions I have laid down, you ought, if you wish to be a member, voluntarily and promptly to comply with the law.

Here I may be met with an inquiry : “Have not the Scriptures already laid down the law of church membership, and does not that include Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and consistent Christian living ? and if these comprise church membership, should the Methodist church add to them by requiring an attendance upon the Class-meeting as a form of Christian communion ?” Let us look at this question.

1. *Baptism*. This is a rite which belongs to no church in particular to the exclusion of others. Nor does it belong to any church as originating in it, or as existing inseparably from it. Baptism is an institution of Christianity, and inseparable from it. Its origin was with Christ. Its practice or celebration is to be connected with the preaching of His Gospel. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature ; baptizing

them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." We have nothing here about baptism being an admission into a church. When St. Peter exhorted the multitudes at Pentecost to repent and be baptized, he did not add, "that ye might be members of a church," but, "for the remission of your sins, and that ye might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In the account of the eunuch's baptism, there is nothing said about his becoming a member of a church thereby. When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about baptism he did not even intimate that that was to them a membership in their church or an admission into it. Where is there a single instance in Scripture in which it is recorded that by baptism a person becomes a member of a church?

If you take the orthodox definition of baptism, "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," there is nothing in this to show that it is an admission into membership with a church.

The truth seems to be, that baptism is an institution connected with Christianity distinct from churches; that wherever Christianity goes this institution goes with it; that whoever would embrace and profess Christianity as his religion, must be baptized into it, according to the form given by the Divine Founder Himself: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Here you have Christianity represented: "baptized," or the application of water, represents the form by which the public identification with this Christianity takes place. Hence the individual by baptism is brought into a formal, if not real, connexion with Christianity, but not necessarily with any sectional church, which, as an organized body, may support Christianity. Baptism is as distinct from churches and membership thereof as Christianity is; or as being born into the human family, and belonging thereto, is distinct from citizenship in any particular nation. This is dependent upon other considerations. If a church choose to agree to make baptism a form or condition of membership, this may be done, as a nation may make

citizenship within it to depend upon the birth of an individual within its bounds. But this is a very different thing from saying that Scripture makes baptism the form of membership in that particular church; and that because a person is baptized by its minister, according to its ceremonies, therefore he scripturally belongs to that church. If that one church was the only embodiment of Christianity existing, or Christianity itself, this might alter the question; but how can it appear that Scripture or Christianity recognises one church to the exclusion of others, any more than St. Paul recognised the Corinthian church to the exclusion of the Philippian, or the Colossian church to the exclusion of the Roman? Of organized churches, as such, the Scriptures or Christianity knows nothing, any more than the book of nature, or nature, knows nothing of nationalities or systems of government. It is true that the Scriptures or Christianity is supposed to produce the material of which churches are formed, as nature produces the peoples of which nations are formed. And just so far as churches embody and represent the Scriptures or Christianity within them, *so far*, it may be allowed, it recognises those churches. As in Christ there is neither Jew, Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female, but Christ is all; so in Christianity there is neither Methodist church, nor Baptist church, neither Episcopalian church, nor Congregational church; but each one, irrespective of name and organization, is recognised according to the measure of Christianity which dwells within it.

2. *The Lord's Supper.* That this alone was not the New Testament form or test of church-membership I shall now endeavour to show. Take the case of Jesus Christ, and His disciples: they *once* received the Lord's Supper, but how often did they have fellowship! Look at the primitive Christians: it is said of them that they "abode steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The doctrine which the apostles preached and taught, they believed: the fellowship which the apostles instituted, they practised. The nature of that fellowship, as

also the nature of the doctrine, may be gathered from their writings in the Epistles, and from the narratives in the Acts. This has already been considered in a previous objection. Now, to say the least of this fellowship, it stands associated with the breaking of bread, or the Lord's Supper; and if you take the order in which it occurs in the text as worth anything, it has the precedence of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper, evidently, did not constitute the *whole* of primitive membership in the church. Before the participation of this there was required a fellowship, as before the fellowship there was required a belief of doctrine. As fellowship was a result, a development of belief in the doctrine, so the Lord's Supper or breaking of bread was a result or development of the fellowship. How could there be a consistent fellowship in the form which the apostles prescribed,—singing, praising, praying, exhorting one another, &c.,—without a faith in the doctrines which the apostles taught? And how could there be a loving, orderly, harmonious breaking of bread together, without a prior fellowship? Look at this in analogy with the social order of life. There is not real fellowship between parties, where there is antagonism in principles and belief; nor is there real and hearty enjoyment at the festive board, where there is no recognised, practised fellowship. What organized society or club, as a rule, takes into their fellowship a man who has little or no sympathy with them in their general principles of action? or, as a rule, takes a man to sit down with them at their private, monthly, quarterly, or annual festivities, if he have no fellowship with them? Who are they to whom you most generously and most frequently extend the invitation to join you at the supper table, but those with whom you are on the most friendly terms, with whom you have passed moments or hours together in social conversation, which has tended to create affection, kindness, confidence, between you? and hence the fellowship having brought about such a happy, mutual state of feeling, you give the invitation, and you partake together of the provision of your goodness as an evidence of your fellowship, and as a

means of promoting that fellowship. With whom did our blessed Lord partake of the bread and wine? Was it not with those who had previously been in His fellowship? With whom did the apostles break bread? Was it not with believers who had fellowship together prior thereto? To whom did St. Paul give directions as to the spirit and manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper? Was it not to the Corinthians who previously had believed the doctrine he preached, and practiced the fellowship he enjoined?

What, I would say then, in regard to the Lord's Supper is, that it is an ordinance instituted by Christ, to stand in connexion with His religion; that as a person by baptism is brought into a formal identification with Christianity, so that same person, by partaking of the Lord's Supper, shows his continuance in formal union with Christianity: that, as a church is supposed to exist for the representation of Christianity, it must have within it, by virtue of the Christianity which it represents, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; that, as the one does not in the abstract necessarily admit into membership with the said *church*, so the other does not imply a continuance in that membership; but that as a church may agree to make the former a condition of entrance into its membership, so it may agree to make the latter a test of continuance in its membership. I say this may be done by a church in regard to its membership; but it does not follow that that membership is the most scriptural, wise, complete, and useful.

3. *Consistent Christian Living.* This can no more constitute membership with a church than consistent living as a man constitutes citizenship in a nation, or membership in a Mechanics' Institute. A man professing Christianity, and belonging to a church which represents the doctrines, interests, agencies, and purposes of Christianity, ought to live in a way according with his profession; but that living is not his membership either in form or in reality. As it is possible for a person to be a member of a church who lives in gross immorality, not to say Christian inconsistency; so it is possible for a person

to live the consistent life of Christianity, and not be a member. As to the obligations of such a one to become a member of a church, that is another question. We are now speaking of the possibility of such a thing, in order to show that Christian living does not in the abstract constitute church membership. Instead of Christian living constituting church membership, may it not be viewed as leading to it where it does not exist, and as assisted by it in the use of various means of grace associated with the church, in connexion with which the membership is sustained?

The conclusion to which I am led by my previous remarks is this, viz., that he who would be a member of the Methodist church, must not only take the sign of his identification with Christianity embodied in that church, by baptism; and not only must he observe the ordinance which is to show his continued connexion with that religion, that is, the Lord's Supper; and not only must he also walk in his life in a way agreeable to that religion; but he must add to the three an entrance into the *form of fellowship* which that religion prescribes, and which the church adopts. What that fellowship is, as involved in Christianity, and as taught by the New Testament, we have noticed in a previous objection.

The Methodist church, in requiring this fellowship as a requisite of membership, does not ignore the membership of other churches, or in any way reflect upon them; any more than the English nation may ignore or reflect upon the French and American nations by certain laws which it may adopt and enforce in its government, in addition to what they already have. The English nation may consider itself more complete, more strong, more prosperous, more united, by the adoption of these laws; and has it not a perfect right to do so? The American or French nation may think that it is sufficiently complete, without these particular laws adopted by the English nation; and it has also the right of thinking so. Thus it is between the Methodist church and other churches in regard to the Class-meeting. Then let us see

churches agree to differ, the same as the nations, each one maintaining its own rights and privileges, with a view not so much to support organizations of government, as to help on the one glorious cause of Christianity.

In regard to a change in the Methodist church in the form of membership : before this is done in the way of *relaxing* it, there is much to be pondered,—and pondered, too, most gravely and prayerfully. It must be shown that the present form has not answered ; that it is unscriptural ; that it is against the interests of the church ; that God has not blessed it and made it a blessing. It must be shown that the modification or change is sure to answer better than the present, is more scriptural, is more conducive to the highest interests of the church, &c. It must be shown what are the motives and reasons for the change, whether from an increase of piety in all its aspects and workings, or a decline ; whether from a desire to develop more mutually, affectionately, brotherly, the social elements of Christianity, or to foster that reserve, isolation, and forgetfulness, which are natural to men in relation to religion.

These are some of the questions to be weighed ere the Methodist church agrees to change its form of membership, either in part or in whole.

It may be all true to say, “ We should swell our members by the thousands, if meeting in Class were not the condition of membership.” So would the membership of the church of the first-born in heaven be augmented a myriad-fold, if God would admit men into it on terms suitable to their own views and wishes. So would secular societies of the world be magnified at a rate beyond all precedent, if members were admitted on the same principle. It is not *bulk* that we want so much as *power*. Look at the Romish church and the Mohammedan delusion—large enough, to be sure ; but what is either doing to bring the world to Christ ? Look, on the other hand, at the small church of the Pentecost. The members were of one heart and one soul in the *fellowship* of the apostles ; and thence they went forth from house to house, from town to town, from

country to country, witnessing for Jesus, and diffusing scriptural holiness. Look at the church of this country in the beginning of the last century, how inert and useless! But the results of Methodism in its rise and progress are before the eyes of the world; and the large share which the Class-meeting or Christian fellowship has contributed to those results, it were not possible to over-estimate. Let the following questions be considered: Has any church since the apostles done so much good in the world with the same amount of agency, and in the same period of time, as the Methodist church? Why should she be so much more useful than other churches, which have the same Bible, the same faith, the same baptism, the same Lord's Supper, the same Holy Spirit, &c.? My answer is, that among several peculiar means which may be named, the Class-meeting has been one of the most powerful.

If the Methodist church is desirous of taking her place among the churches of the past and the present, which have a name to live and are dead, let her by degrees relax her form of membership until the Class-meeting is no more than a thing of name or of history. My knowledge of Methodism extends over a great proportion of England, America, and Canada; and the results of my observations in Camp-meetings, Prayer-meetings, Protracted-meetings, are, that the most zealous, active, holy members, Local Preachers, Leaders, Tract-distributors, Sunday-school Teachers, are those who love the Class-meeting, and conscientiously attend it. Doubtless, the observations of hundreds of Ministers can support me in this. In the face of such facts, can Methodism, which is set up by God for the diffusion of vital godliness through the world, dispense with the Class-meeting in any degree whatsoever? God forbid! How can she do her work, when she has lost the life, the power, the unity, the Holy Ghost, which were wont to come down in the Class-meeting as they came in the early days of Christianity? Dead herself, the religion she spreads will be dead. If that part of the ministry which fain would alter the form of membership, would spend their powers of discussion upon the best methods of purify-

ing the Class-meeting from defects, of infusing more life, love, sociality, power, and fire into it, would not the discussion result in greater good to Methodism and Christianity? If that part of the laity which would like the form of membership changed, would more earnestly and prayerfully bring their minds to compliance with a law of church membership which is so scriptural, so reasonable, so consonant with the genius of Christianity, so in analogy with the common law which rules in all parts of the world political, commercial, scientific, philanthropic, &c.,—would it not promote more deeply and satisfactorily the life of God in their souls, and help them to be more useful in all ways to the church of their fathers, to which, above all others, it is hoped they wish to contribute the chief Christian influence which they have, and of which they are capable?

OBJECTION V.

“I DO NOT SEE THE ADVANTAGES OF THE CLASS-MEETING.”

THERE may be in nature, in the church, and in the state, many things in which you do not see any advantages; and yet there may be advantages in those things of the most momentous importance to all who have to do with them. Others see the advantages, and avail themselves of them; while you gaze and ask the question, “What good is there?” It is so with the Class-meeting. You look and see no good in it, while multitudes *go* and partake of the benefits. The Class-meeting is one of those things from which, if you would gain any good, you must come into contact with by personal experience. A blind man may affirm that there is no good in light; but every one who has the use of his eyes knows to the contrary. A deaf man may say there is no good in hearing; but they whose ears are open

give their unanimous testimonies on the other side. A man whose eyesight or hearing is defective may have very different views of things to one who both sees and hears perfectly. Perhaps, my friend, you cannot see the advantages of the Class-meeting, because you are blind to this one thing; or if you see at all, you may be defective in your views, arising from educational or ecclesiastical training. If you have not honestly examined the subject in its nature, relations, uses, results; or if you have not personally tried it; or if you have not conversed with those on whose judgment, experience, and piety you could rely; how are you prepared to say or even to intimate that there are no advantages to be received from the Class-meeting?

Now, if you are uninformed upon this subject, and possess an inquiring and ingenuous mind, you will have no objection to receive a few words of instruction. The advantages of the Class-meeting may be stated as threefold,—such as are received by the person, the church, the world.

1. If you are uninstructed in experimental religion, the Class-meeting is *a means of receiving knowledge therein*. But you ask, “May I not receive this from the Bible and from religious books?” You may to a certain extent, and in a certain way. The knowledge you acquire in this manner will neither be so satisfactory nor useful as that which you would gain from communion with those who actually speak of what they have *seen*, and *heard*, and *felt*. Information received on *written* authority, however excellent and true, is not equal in value and effect to that received from the *lips* of living persons. Would you not much rather receive the knowledge of any individual, or place, or thing, from a friend’s words spoken to you in your presence, than have the same communicated in writing? The judge, the counsel, the jury, require the personal living witnesses to *speak* in their presence the things which they know. “In the MOUTH of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” In multitudes of cases in life, not only is the written statement called for, but the verbal must be *forthcoming* also, to see if the

two agree ; and if agreeing, the greater the evidence to the cause in question. In the Scriptures and religious books, you have the *written* testimony : in the Class-meeting, you have the *verbal*. In the one, you *read* what religion *was* and *did* in former times ; in the other, you *hear* what it *is*, and how it acts in the times that now are. You are able to compare the past with the present, the verbal with the written. You find that in the essentials they perfectly agree. The past confirms the present, and the present the past ; the recorded religion in the books corroborates that spoken in the meeting, and *vice versa*. Thus from the two you obtain a knowledge of experimental religion, and a confidence in it, which you could not have received from the written alone. "I knew much of religion in the theory, as acquired from reading good books, and hearing good sermons ; but not until I *heard* the living weekly statements of God's people when they met for the relation of their experience one to the other, did I fully understand even in the theory what vital, experimental Christianity was." This is the testimony of many whose judgment and wisdom cannot be called in question.

A sceptical, but intelligent lawyer from curiosity once attended a Class-meeting. He sat and heard the various members give their individual experience in the things of God. He heard all and said nothing. But after leaving he reflected upon the meeting which he had visited, thus :—"I have been listening to the testimony of some twelve or fourteen persons concerning religion as it affects the heart and life. Any two or three of these persons giving evidence in a court of justice would be sufficient to establish a case on trial. If the judge, the jury, and myself, would admit their testimony on a civil matter, why should I call in question their evidence on religious subjects ? Here is the united evidence of twelve or fourteen. Surely there is some truth in what they say. They are right in believing religion, and I am wrong in doubting it." The result of his visit to the meeting was a personal acceptance of religion, and an entrance into this form of Christian fellowship.

2. *By meeting in Class, you take a decisive and public step in showing that you either are a Christian, or wish to be one.* This means of grace is designed exclusively for such; and he who joins it is understood to have an experience in religion, or to be seeking it. A person becoming a member who is in neither state of mind, very soon finds that the Class-meeting is not the place for him, and gives up the attendance. It is with the Class-meeting in this regard as with other things in the secular world. Take for instance a school in any particular branch of education;—a school of art. This is only intended for such as are either studying art, or such as wish to do so: none but such are supposed to enter, or to be received. Should, however, one join who has no taste, or who thinks he has, but, discovers upon trial that he is mistaken, he either gradually retires, or suddenly gives up his connexion with the school. Again, as he who should join a school of art, and persevere in his studies, would show his taste to incline in that way of education; so he who joins the Class-meeting, and continues faithful, evinces that he has religious desires leading him in that direction, and that he wishes those desires to be cherished and developed according to the religious life there professed and experienced. Moreover, as he who thus joins a school of art, thereby manifests his good taste and decided mind to all who are in the school as students, and to others besides, and also patronizes art, and encourages its interests in the state; so he who unites in the communion of saints, demonstrates his spiritual condition to be higher than the masses around him; evinces his decision for religion before Christians in the church and sinners in the world; and also gives both his sanction and his influence to the spread of religion in the world around.

3. If you have an experience in religion, the Class-meeting will be *a means of edification to it*. I do not dispute that other means of a private and public nature may conduce to this; but this I may state, that the communion of saints being a scripturally-appointed means of Christian edification, as has

been shown, there is no other means which can be used as a substitute for it to answer the same purpose. As the private means cannot answer the same end as the public, nor the public the same as the private, so either or both together cannot answer the same end as *this* social means, in the advantages to be received.

In Christian experience there are certain features which seem to require the *social* gathering of God's people to meet them. For instance, you may be the subject of *doubt*: here you may find the experience of a fellow-member, which will tend to disperse the doubt and inspire assurance. You may be the subject of *lukewarmness*: here the repetition of some Divine admonition or an earnest exhortation to diligence, or the flames of holy zeal burning in the experience of some brother, may arouse you to more intensity of feeling for God, and more energetic action in your personal salvation. You may be the subject of affliction in your family: here you meet with the sympathy, the prayers, the condolence of those who know what it is to be in similar circumstances. You may be oppressed and tried with the affairs of life: here you gain relief in the increased supply of grace from God. You may be *tempted*: here you unburden the soul, so far as you think necessary; the spell is broken, and you shout in victory over your foe. You may have a hungering and thirsting after righteousness: here you drink of the wine, and eat of the dainties in the banqueting-house of your Lord. You may sometimes feel as though you were solitary in the ways of life: here the feeling is dispersed, and you rejoice in the fact that you are one in a *company* travelling to Mount Zion. In a word, you may have any phase or degree of Christian experience, and here you will meet with something which will respond to it in a way that will serve your edification. By going to this means of grace in a manner such as becomes it, you will realize the truth of the promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," &c. You shall grow stronger and stronger in the duties, trials, temptations, privileges, and hopes of the higher life. You shall be more

able to withstand the scepticism, formalism, and persecutions of the age; and to give every one that asketh you a reason for the hope which is in you. There will be no part of your life, personal or relative, private or public, secular or religious, that will not reap the benefit arising from the Class-meeting to your Christian experience.

The advantages flowing from the relation of *experience* in science, philosophy, politics, agriculture, at meetings held for the purpose, cannot be estimated. If the philosopher studies philosophy better, and experiments more successfully; if the farmer works his land better, and makes it more productive; if the politician catches inspiration in his party's cause; if all these, and others in worldly things, gain advantage in their several pursuits in life by meeting together, why should not Christians? Is not religious experience as likely to be promoted in the social gathering of God-fearing people for that purpose, as experience in the study and practice of things pertaining to this life?

4. By meeting in Class you gain *a strong church guard in the public religious life*, which no other external means of the church can supply. You carry with you the thought, that you are one with those who meet for mutual edification in the things of Christ; that you have to contribute your share to this by the truthful statement of your own experience. This thought, rightly appreciated, creates a sense of obligation to live in such consistency and watchfulness as may not exist in its absence. You not only feel the force of the thought as it thus dwells in your own bosom, but you are influenced by the knowledge that others are privy to the fact of your membership with Christ's people. Hence you feel a guard around you of a church kind, which you could not feel if you did not partake of this fellowship. You feel the propriety and force of the Scripture language, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with

idols?" "Wherefore" you "come out from among them" and are "separate," as the Lord commands you.

It is nothing against this view to say that such is not the effect of the Class-meeting on some. Every law has its transgressor; every way has its wanderer; so this guard may be broken through by some who underrate their privilege, and throw off not only the restraints of the church, but the restraints of God.

5. The fellowship of Christ's people on earth *is a means of preparing for their fellowship in heaven.* There is a church in heaven as well as on earth. This church is made up of the saints in Christ Jesus, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They sit down together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They stand before the throne together; they sing the new song together. Is not the fellowship of the saints in heaven of the most perfect nature, the same as every other element of heaven? If then there is fellowship in heaven, should we not prepare for it here, as much as we prepare for its *purity*? Are we to sing together with the undefiled in heaven, without any mixture of the impure? then, ought we not to foster our preparedness for this, by singing with such, as far as we can find them, on earth? Are we to dwell with the white-robed ones in heaven, in eternal communion of joy, peace, love, without the presence of any that are unsanctified, and should we not further our fitness for such society by entering into their company all we can while in this world? What is the militant church for, but as a way through the use of which we may join the triumphant above? Fellowship with the saints in the holy place now, is the church path-way to their fellowship hereafter. Wesley sets forth this use of the Class-meeting in many of his soul-stirring hymns as,—

"We meet the grace to take
Which thou hast freely given:
We meet on earth for Thy dear sake,
That we may meet in heaven."

Again he says in a hymn-petition for one of these meetings :—

“ O Jesus, appear ! no longer delay,
To sanctify here, and bear us away :
The end of our meeting on earth let us see,
Triumphantly sitting in glory with thee.”

I said there were advantages arising to the *church* from the Class-meeting. Just so far as the interests of the individual members are promoted, the church is benefitted. The Class-meeting is productive of sympathy, unity, zeal, co-operation, power, extension, prayer, in the church.

If you, as an individual, join the church in its fellowship, you add to her strength in all the particulars specified. You may, to be sure, think yourself but little acquisition. Nevertheless, you are one ; and out of the one God might bring a score or a hundred. And even should you remain the unit without multiplication or addition, the church is benefitted by you, as one burning lamp added to a hundred increases the light ; as one drop added to the river augments its quantity ; as one soldier enlisted in the army strengthens the forces ; as one witness more in the court gives additional testimony to the case.

I said, too, that the Class-meeting is beneficial, to the world. It is so, inasmuch as it is beneficial to the church ; the church having in charge, under the Spirit, the enlightenment, the conversion, and the sanctification of the world.

Other thoughts might have been advanced on each of these particulars, as well as upon the separate heads ; but my limited space will not allow of more. How much might have been gathered from the recorded experience of the glorified and happy dead, and from the faithful living, to set forth the advantages of the Class-meeting ! Could we hear the testimonies of Carvosso, Fletcher, Hester Ann Rogers, Mrs. Cryer, Longden, Henley, Smith, Stoner, Hunt, &c., O, how clear, how full, how emphatic, would their testimonies be ! Could we hear the testimonies of the living, they would be in sound as the voice of many waters, and in authority as reliable as the witnesses of our Lord.

OBJECTION VI.

"I HAVE ATTENDED CLASS-MEETING FOR YEARS, BUT COULD NOT ENJOY IT, OR DERIVE MUCH GOOD FROM IT."

IN this case it may be a subject of just inquiry, whether the reasons have been in the Class-meeting or in you. It is not difficult to see how the Class-meeting may be a means of grace in its nature and use highly profitable, while you may neither enjoy it nor derive any advantage from it. There are thousands who profess religion, and derive no more real pleasure to the soul from it than those who make no profession at all. The reason of this is, they only profess. They have a name to live, but are dead; and can really dead persons enjoy anything, although they may be *said* to have life? A very sumptuous meal may be provided in a household, and one of the children may feel no pleasure in partaking of it, or derive any good from what he does partake. Now, assuming that the provisions are good, from the fact that all the rest of the family partake with great delight, the reasons for the child's non-enjoyment must be in his appetite or general state of health. A minister may preach a highly intellectual, and withal a useful sermon, with which one man might find fault, and affirm he gained no good from it, while almost every one else that heard the sermon is warm in utterances of commendation, and loud in expressions of personal good received under its delivery. Where is the fault in this case? So, the Class-meeting may be a means of promoting the spiritual edification of the great majority who use it, while here and there may be one who speaks as in the objection. But it may be very truthfully stated that the ground of the objection is not in the means, but in the objector himself.

My brother, suffer a word of exhortation. Examine more minutely into the matter, why you have not enjoyed the Class-

meeting as a means of grace. Have you a relish for spiritual things? Are you hungering after the bread of life, and thirsting for the water of life? Have you love to Christ, and sympathy with His people, or are you inclined towards the things and the company which are evil? Have you any Christian experience at all? Is there even left the feeling with which you began to meet in Class,—“a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to save your soul?” If such is not the case, can you wonder that you have derived no good from the Class-meeting?

It may be well, also, for you to ascertain the motives which have led you to attend for so long a time, and also the spirit and manner with which you have gone. Has your attendance been from a desire to receive good and do good? Have you been as regular as time and circumstances would allow? Have you ever taken up a cross in the way of going, and borne it as you went? Your attendance may have been irregular; only when convenient to feelings, or to business, or to company, or to the entertainment of friendly parties. You may have gone with little or no prayer preceding or accompanying. There may have been a prejudice or antipathy in the mind towards the means, associated with a degree of religious indifference. You may have looked more to the education or words of the Leader than to his spirit and aim. It is possible that you have oftentimes sat with your fellow-members under the influence of jealousy or censoriousness. *Love*, which should be triumphant in the fellowship of saints, may have been a slave dragged at the heels of contrary dispositions.

If such, in whole or in part, have been the facts in relation to your attendance upon Class, can you wonder, brother, I ask again, that you have not enjoyed it, or derived any good from it? Go to your business with a heart of indifference, unbelief, and carelessness as to whether you succeed or fail, and will you enjoy it, or make much gain in it? Go into the circle of the evening party in a way similar to that indicated above, and will you have pleasure there? Go to the sea-side in the summer season with

a feeling of prejudice against that way of gaining physical invigoration, and indifferent as to whether you acquire increased strength, or remain enfeebled; and do you suppose you would come home much the better for your visit? In fine, all things in life, which in their nature and design are calculated to promote our enjoyment and interests, may be utterly frustrated by the peculiar views we entertain of them, and the peculiar way in which we use them.

The law of *adaptation* will apply to this subject as to many others. Unless the heart and life exist in a state somewhat corresponding with the nature, operations, and purposes of this form of Christian fellowship, it can no more be enjoyed than light by eyes which are too delicate to admit it; than food by a stomach which is too disordered to receive it; than holiness by a soul that is only carnal, sensual, devilish; than heaven by a man who has never been born again from above.

Permit me now, in a closing paragraph, to suggest a way in which you might enjoy the Class-meeting, and reap great good from it. Look at it as a means of grace, scriptural in its authority, spiritual in its nature, blessed in its right use, and beneficial in its results. Let this be your theory of it, resting upon the evidences supplied by Scripture, by the history of the Class-meeting, by the experience of myriads who have been consistent and holy members. With this theory resting upon such a basis, go to the Class-meeting as a person anxious to save your soul, and willing to use all the means you can to do so. Make it as much a spiritual business to go to Class as you do a temporal business to go to market, to the exchange, or any other place where your secular interests may be promoted. Regard your Class as a well-spring by the way in your journey through this desert-life to the heavenly Canaan, and go to it with a soul athirst for the water of life. Look at your Class as the gathering of your friends in Jesus, and go anticipating the pleasure of an hour's interview with those whom you love, in the things which make for your peace. Go with a soul prepared by closet prayer and a life of consistency; go with the love of your-

Redeemer and His people in your heart ; go in all genuineness of feeling and simplicity of motive. When there, wait before the Lord ; sit with your fellow-saints as in the presence of Christ Jesus ; speak, sing, pray with all the happy, social, sincere, joyous, and brotherly dispositions which your religion can inspire : and three months after you have attended your Class in this way, write me and say whether you object to the Class-meeting because you do not enjoy it, and derive any good from it.

OBJECTION VII.

“ I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO MEET IN CLASS.”

It is much better that you should consider yourself unfit than too good. While, however, you do not run into this extreme, as many do, take care that you do not run into the opposite extreme, and thus produce similar results in your actions. The Class-meeting is not designed for those who know too much to be taught ; who are too holy to be made holier. Like religion, the hospital, the physician, and even the Redeemer Himself, it is for the unworthy, the unholy, the morally diseased. If you were afflicted, you would not wait till you were well before you sent for the doctor. If you were on a journey and lost your way, you would not defer inquiring for the right road until you had found it. If you were poor and wanted to be rich, you would not delay using the means until you had obtained the riches. No ; it is the sick that have need of the physician ; the lost that have need of the guide ; the poor that have need of the ways and means of gaining wealth. So it is the seeking soul, the soul penitent, sin-stricken, humble, naked, miserable, inquiring after Christ, looking for redemption in the blood of the cross, and hoping

for heaven through the one blessed Mediator, that has need of the communion of saints. You may not be "good enough," but that is no reason for keeping away, but the very reason why you should go.

In order, however, that you may see for yourself what are the conditions of entering the Methodist church as a member, and of continuing such, I will lay before you the words as contained in the "Rules" of our church:—

"There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these Societies; viz., '*a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.*' But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

"*First*, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practised. Such is

"The taking the name of God in vain:—

"The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling:

"Drunkenness; *buying or selling spirituous liquors*, or *drinking them*, unless in cases of extreme necessity:

"*Fighting, quarrelling, brawling*; brother *going to law* with brother; *returning evil for evil*, or *railing for railing*; *the using many words* in buying or selling:

"The *buying or selling uncustomed goods*:

"The *giving or taking things on usury*; i.e., unlawful interest:

"*Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation*; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers:

"Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us:

"Doing what we know is not for the glory of GOD; as,

"The *putting on of gold or costly apparel*;

"The *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the LORD JESUS;

"The *singing those songs, or reading those books*, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of GOD:

"Softness, and needless self-indulgence:

“Laying up treasures upon earth :

“Borrowing without a probability of paying ; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

“It is expected of all who continue in these Societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

“*Secondly*, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power ; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men :

“To their bodies, of the ability that God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison :

“To their souls ; by instructing, *reproving*, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with ; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that ‘we are not to do good, unless *our heart be free to it.*’

“By doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be ; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business ; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them *only*.

“By all possible *diligence* and *frugality*, that the Gospel be not blamed.

“By running with patience the race that is set before them, *denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily* ; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ ; to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world ; and looking that men should *say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord’s sake*.

“It is expected of all who desire to continue in these Societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

“*Thirdly*, By attending upon all the ordinances of God : such are,

“The public worship of God ;

“The ministry of the word, either read or expounded ;

“The supper of the Lord ;

“Family and private prayer ;

“Searching the Scriptures; and

“Fasting or abstinence.

“These are the general rules of our Societies: all which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know His Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart.”

It has been laid to the charge of the Methodists that they make the door of entrance into their church too easy, and the terms of continuance too lax; that persons are admitted who do not meet the New Testament requirement of church membership, and persons continued who live in violation of New Testament precepts.

In reply to this I need do no more than refer to the preceding “Rules.” Will any one carefully read them, and say what there is wanting, or what there is superfluous, as measured by the New Testament rules of Christian life? Let them be compared with the laws and regulations of the membership of any other church, and I am sure they will not suffer by the comparison.

“It is expected of all who continue therein,” (that is, in membership,) “that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation” by keeping these rules. “If there be any among us,” says Wesley, “who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them, who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us.”

And then as to our terms of admission, *a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from sin*; is there anything here contrary to the New Testament condition of admission into the Church? If so, let it be pointed out. Where is it *specifically* stated in the New Testament what are the precise requirements of those who wish to unite with the church? Where, on the one hand, do we find *baptism*? or, on the other,

conversion ? That many were converted and baptized before they entered the churches of apostolic times, may be safely admitted ; but that these were the terms of admission, or that none but such were admitted, is, to say the least, very questionable. Is a man made a partaker of the grace and Spirit of Christ, and not a member ? let him join by all means. Is another only a sincere seeker of these blessings ? who will prevent him from doing the same ? The terms as stated above exclude the insincere, and the ungodly, while they provide for the penitent and the pardoned. The terms of admission make the gate sufficiently strait to exclude all who *should not* enter ; and the "rules" make the way sufficiently narrow to preserve them upright who wish to keep therein. Do you ask faith and repentance from those who join the church ? They are both included in "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from sin ;" yea, there is even conversion here in a restricted sense ; for, can a man desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from sin, without *turning* from his love and practice of sin, by the grace and Spirit of Christ given unto him ? And do you ask for practical godliness from those who are members of the church ? Then I ask, where will you find more comprehensive New Testament godliness than is embodied in the above rules ; which rules are required to be observed in the spirit, if not in the letter, by those who would continue in the Methodist church ?

And now, my friend, after somewhat of a digression from you, allow me to say in conclusion, that if you have a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from your sins, you are fully prepared to enter into that form of church membership implied in Class-meetings. You have a loving welcome from the gracious Head of the church ; and there is not a right-hearted member of the church but would rejoice with gladness in the knowledge of your union. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good : for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

OBJECTION VIII.

"I FEAR TO COMMENCE MEETING IN CLASS, LEST I
SHOULD NOT CONTINUE."

YOU had better be thus fearful, than possessed of an amount of self-confidence which would at once prove your ruin. At the same time, you must guard against a fear which is likely to prove as injurious as self-confidence. Should you join Class with a fear true in its nature and measure, it may be for your good rather than your evil. There is a fear which produces weakness, trepidation, and despair, resulting in a total neglect of the means of self-defence and self-preservation. Should you join with a fear like this, it would of necessity soon bring about the evil which you deprecate. There is a fear which produces examination, watchfulness, diligence, enterprise, resolution; as that of the soldier, who, while he sees death in the battle field, sees, also, the possibility of victory, and so fights to gain it; or that of the traveller, who, while he sees danger in the way, exercises greater vigilance and caution in his journey; or that of the tradesman, who, while he apprehends something wrong in his accounts, examines them the more carefully in order to ascertain the ground of alarm. If you should unite yourself with Christ's people under the influence of such a fear as this, it would be the means of your perseverance instead of your unfaithfulness.

Duty should be one of the guides of your action in the matter now under consideration. Do you feel it to be obligatory upon you to unite yourself with the people of God in this form of Christian communion? Does the feeling arise from the convictions of the Spirit, the teachings of the Scriptures, and from a conscious necessity of the help which such communion may afford? Then you are bound to act by this present sense of duty, and not by your sense of fear of future failure. Duty is fact now felt: failure is an uncertainty in the distance.

Duty which you now feel cannot be dispensed with, only by the incurring of guilt; failure in the future which you fear, may be averted by prompt attention to present duty.

Regard to present welfare ought to influence you rather than fear of future failure. By entering into the fellowship of Christ's people now, you would reap advantages which would meet your necessities. Is it wisdom to make the present miserable from fear of the future? Should to-day be made evil, or its evil increased, by thoughts of to-morrow's contingencies? The future may never come; the present need of comfort, instruction, encouragement, is fact which you feel. Then, I say, regard your welfare *now*, and do not neglect it by the indulgence of fear which has nothing but uncertainty on which to rest.

The emigrant who is convinced of the necessity and advantages of going to a foreign land, does not let the fear of storms, shipwrecks, sickness, or death, detain him from crossing the sea in pursuit of what he believes will be for his good. The philanthropist, convinced that it is his duty to do good, does not refrain entering hospitals, jails, dens, and hovels, from fear that he should fall victim to some frightful disease. An engineer does not give up his enterprise in some magnificent work, from fear that he may fail in his undertaking. Nor should you be kept from uniting yourself with the church, from fear that you will not remain steadfast.

Will not the fear that keeps you from joining the church, keep you from prayer, from ways of usefulness, from the profession of religion, from the Lord's Supper, and other parts of practical godliness? In one word, will it not keep you out of heaven? (See Rev. xxi.)

Lay aside your fear which is calculated to bring about such consequences. Take to yourself hope, bright, vigorous, impelling, saving. If you must have fear, then let hope be its companion, to modify, counsel, and guide it. Under the influence of hope, give yourself to Christ and His people; and, in the use of the same hope, give yourself to the diligent and

regular use of the means which Christ and His church provide. Thereby you shall enjoy the communion of saints; walk uprightly before heaven and earth; become rooted and grounded in love; abide steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Your failure in the future which you fear, shall be no more realized than the means shall prove inefficient, or Divine power prove unable to keep you. Failures in the religious life are not among those who give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. These are they who are neither barren nor unfruitful; but are faithful unto death, and have an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

OBJECTION IX.

“I CANNOT SPEAK MY RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE CLASS-MEETING.”

IN this objection you confess that you have an experience in religion. This implies that you know what religion is, and also what is experience in religion. If you can thus distinguish between religion and irreligion, between experience in religion and theory in religion, you have the matter clearly and definitely before you. Then, why can you not express it in its various parts and degrees, so far as you have attained unto it? If you have an experience in your trade, your business, your profession, your domestic duties, have you any difficulty in expressing *that* experience? Are you afflicted in your body with some disease, can you not tell your experience of that disease, so far as it affects your feelings and comes within your knowledge?

“But I could tell my experience in writing, or to a very intimate friend, or to my minister in private.” Then the point is not *the relation of your experience*, but the *way* of relating it, and the *persons* before whom it must be spoken.

First, as to the *persons*: they are all the professed followers of Christ; they claim experience in the same religion in which you have experience. They are your "brethren" "in the household of faith;" "fellow-heirs" in the same grace of God and hope of eternal life; common friends in the holy and blessed friendship of the Redeemer; one with you in the unity of the Spirit, in the fellowship of Jesus, and in the communion of God; they are children with you in the family of which there is only one Father, to whom you all alike go and say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." In view of such affinities, relations, equalities, between you and the *persons*, surely there is no reason why you should object to speak your religious experience to *them*. Were you casting your pearls before swine, or speaking an unknown tongue, or uttering things they could not understand; were they averse to you in belief, practice, or experience; or were they incapable of sympathy with you in the things of God, there might be a justifiable excuse for you. It would be consistent to say you could not speak your experience before them.

Secondly, as to the *way*. What idea have you in regard to the way in which your experience should be stated? Do you suppose that you have to prepare a set speech, and deliver it as a man on a platform to a public audience? Do you suppose that you are required to speak according to the rules of grammar or rhetoric, or that you must say only certain things, or speak a certain length of time, or study to please those who hear you in the choice of words, phrases, and sentences? Now, nothing can be farther from the point than any one of these suppositions. The way in which religious experience is desired and ought to be given in the Class-meeting, is in a way simple, ingenuous, sincere, truthful, humble; in a way that shall bring out nothing more nor less than the *present religious state before God*, so as to be profitable to the one that speaks and to those that hear, and to bring glory to God. Any divergence from this is a departure from the right and proper way. As the free, easy, and spontaneous utterances in the

happy family circle or social meeting, so should be the utterances of religious experience in the Class-meeting. As the unfettered, the voluntary, the full pouring-out of the minds of many even of the ungodly in their meetings for edification in sin, so should be the telling of religious experience in the communion of saints for their edification in the faith and holiness of Christ Jesus. Be yourself in the relation of your experience. Have no way but your own. Aim not at the imitation of others. Though your language may be the most rugged or the most refined, though you may have but a few words to utter, though you may have nothing satisfactory to yourself to express,—be yourself. Let nothing come in to interfere with the candour and simplicity of your statements.

The real ground, then, of your objection is not in the Class-meeting, but in yourself, either in the want of religious experience to express, or in the want of physical and moral courage to take up your cross and tell what great things God has done for you. I must not assume that you are wanting in religious experience, as this has been granted before. I will suppose that the hindrance exists in the want of physical and moral courage. In doing this, I must inquire how far, or whether at all, this want affects you in other things. If you have no such want in speaking upon any secular things, in the family, in the street, in the market, in the social circle of the evening, how is it that you have it in religious things? Is it not singular that in the one you should possess readiness, fulness, fluency, ability, and not in the other? It may be that if you were as well versed in religious experience as in other things, felt as much interest in religion and the church, and accustomed yourself to as frequent speaking about religion to God's people, as about secular matters to worldly people, you would have as much courage in the one as in the other.

The conclusion to which I come upon this objection is, that if it cannot be absolutely and totally removed, it may be lessened so as to form no difficulty in the way of entering upon the fellowship of Christ's people in the Class-meeting. My brother, *if it is a cross for you to take up to go to the Class-meeting, and*

to speak there, then take up that cross. Like a disciple of Him who bore an infinitely heavier cross than this for you; like a follower of the ten thousand martyrs who, for their religion's sake, confessed before many witnesses, in the midst of the fire, at the rack, on the scaffold, the Lord Jesus Christ, —take up this cross which lies before you. It may be hard to stoop to reach at first, and it may be heavy to bear when you have put it on your shoulders: nevertheless, do it for the honour of your Master, for the sake of a good conscience, and for the benefit of your fellow Christians. It shall soon fit itself to your person, or your person to it; and, instead of being a burden, you will find it an essential part of your spiritual being, or, at least, so tributary to your spiritual being that to lay it aside would be a greater cross than taking it, and seem like the giving up of a necessary means of life.

Go, my brother, or my sister, to the company of Christ's people. Go, *as* one of them. Take your seat among them as one of them. Cast away fear before your brethren. Do not stand in awe of your friends. They will welcome you with joy, and give you a brotherly recognition. If you really cannot command courage to speak for the first few times all you would wish, or all that you feel, do as the child learning to speak,—utter the *stammerings of experience*. Or even if you cannot speak at all, take your place. Your very dumbness may be an occasion of benefit to some; while you will hear the various experiences of others. As you continue to “wait on the Lord” in this duty, “and be of good courage, He will strengthen your heart,” so that you will be able, in the fulness of your happy soul, to tell unto them that fear the Lord what He hath done for you. You will find that in this, as in other things, practice and growth in Christian graces and fellowship inspire confidence and courage.

OBJECTION X.

“CLASS-MEETINGS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE.”

ALTHOUGH this is not an objection which is so frequently expressed as some others, yet it is an objection that exerts its influence on the *minds* of more than express it in words. Some who are *really* too poor to pay, make the objection in all honesty and conscientiousness, not wishing to avail themselves of the privileges of a church without contributing to its pecuniary support. There is another class who, while they are well able to meet all monetary requirements in the Class, nevertheless absent themselves because of this very thing.

I shall first of all speak to the latter class of people; and in doing so will look at the abstract question of contributing to the pecuniary support of the Gospel. By the support of the Gospel is meant the support of those means and agencies by which the Gospel as a system of religion is maintained and promulgated in the world. Now the means and agencies of the Gospel must be supported the same as the means and agencies of any secular or political organization. Men who have given themselves to the office of proclaiming the Gospel can no more do so without temporal support, than a tradesman who follows his trade, or an ambassador who represents his monarch and country in a foreign court.

And how should they be supported? The Apostle Paul answers this question at once in a way which agrees with all Scripture, reason, and analogy. “They that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel;” by which he does not mean that they are physically to live upon the Gospel, but that the Gospel which they preach is to be the means of bringing forth from them who hear it and partake of its benefits, the necessary things for their livelihood. Does he not explain his meaning when he says, “They who minister at the altar partake of the

things of the altar?" (see 1 Cor. ix. :) not of the altar itself, but the things which the altar called upon the people to give as sacrifices. How is the government of this country sustained, but by the people who partake of its immunities? How are the various Assurance Societies supported, but upon the same principle? Does not this principle rest on sound reason and justice, as applied to the support of the Gospel?

And then, as to the measure of support to be given, St. Paul lays this down in two passages: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; for the labourer is worthy of his hire;" "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your worldly things?"—evidently meaning that the contribution of the temporal things of the Corinthians to their support was little in comparison with the spiritual which they had received through their labours. (1 Cor. ix.) Again he says, "Let him that is taught in the word minister unto him that teacheth, in all good things," (Gal. vi. 6,) by which he shows that the support of the ministry is just, and obligatory, upon him who receives the ministrations, and that that support must be liberal and generous "in all good things."

It is very clear, then, that St. Paul does not stand on the side of those who advocate what they call "a free Gospel," and declaim against what they call "a hired ministry." Though he himself, under certain circumstances, preached the Gospel free of pecuniary compensation, he is far from laying this down as an example. It was voluntary on his part, and he does not therefore impose it upon any other; but the principle of supporting the ministry he lays down as immutably just and right, as much so under the new as the old dispensation; and, being immutably just and right, obligatory upon those who are partakers of the benefits of the ministration of the Gospel. When I say obligatory, I mean obligatory in a *moral* sense; there being no *legal* impositions in the Gospel apart from its teachings. These are strong enough in themselves, and, with a good conscience, could admit of no additional force.

As to the *method* of raising the support of the ministry, there

is no uniformity among the churches. This is a matter which each church may decide for itself, as each nation may adopt its own plan of procuring the ways and means of its governmental support. The plan existing among the Methodists is one which in its origin seems to have had the stamp of Providence upon it; which in its operation seems to have worked well and answered the end. It will, there is no doubt, bear comparison with any other method existing.

As to the amount required, and ways of paying it: the rule bearing upon this particular is not like the laws of the Medes and Persians. It can, and often does, bend and accommodate itself to temporal circumstances. In case there is wanting the ability to give the "penny a week and shilling a quarter," it does not exact either the one or the other; but can relax its claim or waive its obligation entirely. On the other hand, where there is in possession from the Divine bounty, that which can afford the shilling or two-and-sixpence a week, and the pound or five pounds per quarter, the rule can in this case, as in the former, forego its mere letter; and, where these amounts are contributed, it beautifully submits to the hand which lays it aside.

Now a person who would object to meet in Class because of the rule which asks him for one penny per week and one shilling per quarter towards the support of them who preach to him the everlasting Gospel, must be in a most unenviable state of mind. His soul must, in one view of it, be shrivelled up like a leaf scorched by the sun; or, in another view, so wide in its grasping that it will take all it can catch, and yield no thank-offering in return. Eight shillings and four pence for twelve long months! Too much towards keeping in respectable life the man who is the teacher of truth, the guard of virtue, the counsellor in difficulty, the patron of all goodness, the comforter of the afflicted, &c.! Tell it not in Gath! Surely such a man is more a subject for converting grace than Christian edification.

"But is there not something besides the 'penny a week and the shilling a quarter?'" Let us see: truly, brother, there is. We would not deceive you upon a question of such untold

importance to you ; for to be deceived in a monetary matter is to you, probably, of all things, the most serious. Well, then, the "something besides" are two half yearly contributions—one in September, and one in March : the former to help in sustaining a fund from which afflicted and aged Ministers who are unable to follow their work are supported ; also widows and children of deceased Ministers : the latter for the sustenance of a fund from which Ministers receiving insufficient support from poor Circuits, obtain a grant which may help them in their difficulties. And what is the amount which the rule requires in each case ? It is the sum of SIXPENCE ! Here, again, let it be observed, the rule is not inflexible either one way or the other. It frequently sees itself ignored, while it is satisfied to see itself adhered to in the letter, and in some instances gratefully sees itself exceeded by them who are well able to do so.

Surely, my friend, you will not allow two such insignificant sums as these to form any obstacle in the way of availing yourself of the communion of saints, supposing you have a desire to do so. Not to say a word upon the *justice* of contributing to the two funds alluded to, does not *charity* commend them, and even render contributions obligatory. And what smaller amount could the rule ask for, unless it should insult the common and natural beneficence of your nature, not to say the Christian ? Unless you are indeed far gone below even the general grade of ungodly people in mercy and circumstances, do you not in mere almsgivings dispense to the poor of your streets or at your doors, sums exceeding in the aggregate *twelve pence in a year* ?

But perhaps you object to the *time* of paying. You think that the Class-meeting is a *spiritual means*, and that the money question should not be connected with it at all. If you have a real conscientious scruple upon this matter, I know of no Leader or Minister but would, for your conscience' sake, excuse you from connecting the temporal with the spiritual, and give you the privilege of contributing at a time most according with your convictions. But may not your objection be a mere

fancy, or a scruple, which would vanish before a more broad and thorough looking at the subject? Is it possible to separate the temporal from the spiritual in this world? Were you to send your contributions to the Leader or Steward at a time apart from the Class-meeting, the separation of the temporal from the spiritual would not be effected. The motive, if a right one, from which you sent it would be spiritual, the cause for which you sent it would be spiritual, but the contribution itself would be temporal, excepting so far as it was sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Now, it seems to me that the actual contribution of a pecuniary sum at the time the rule asks for it, cannot secularize the meeting any more than the giving of it at another time can secularize the motive from which it is given, or the cause for which it is given. Connecting the pecuniary and spiritual together in the Class-meeting may teach important lessons, viz., that we should not appear before the Lord empty,—that we acknowledge the Lord's goodness in temporal things,—that we show our mutual willingness to support the cause of God with which we are identified,—that we recognise the weekly offering principle laid down by St. Paul. And then the few moments in which the whole pecuniary part is transacted is not likely to militate against the spirituality of the meeting.

There may be another objection which you have, and that is to pay your contributions *weekly*. You would probably prefer giving what you have to give either quarterly, half-yearly, or annually. It may be that to some few, one or the other of these periodic payments would be more convenient and agreeable; but if adopted, as a general practice, it would materially affect the aggregate contributions of each. This weekly and quarterly contribution system, as existing in the Classes, is one of the grand means of sustaining the Methodist ministry in temporal comforts, which equal, as a whole, those of the ministry of wealthier churches in the land. Whereas, if this system was dispensed with, the probability is that either the number of the ministry must be reduced, or the average amount of their stipends be lessened. With the present system, the majority

contribute more on the whole than they would quarterly, half-yearly, or annually. Besides, it is unquestionably more convenient and less a burden to distribute an amount over thirteen weeks, than it would be to give that amount in one round sum. A mechanic, for instance, taking two or three shillings at the end of three months out of his weekly earnings, may regard it as a heavy sum; whereas, the taking of one or two pence may be an amount that he may scarcely notice. In the one way he may think that a shilling would be as much as he could afford; in the other, he may give double the amount with equal ease and comfort, while the cause of God would be more liberally supported.

Besides these considerations, the weekly payment is one means of preserving a more regular attendance upon the Class-meeting as a means of grace. I may state, without any fear, that multitudes in the course of every year give up membership in Methodist churches because of the neglect of the weekly contribution. They omit their money the first, the second, the third meeting, &c., until it accumulates to a sum larger than they think they can pay; and, possessing the modesty which will not let them go without meeting their obligations, and feeling that it is not in their power to do so, they ultimately absent themselves altogether; and sometimes all the persuasiveness of Leaders and Ministers cannot induce them to begin again. The pecuniary neglect led to the spiritual, until both together robbed them of their appetite for Christian communion, and so they gave up entirely.

In view of considerations like these, may you not then waive your objection, even though it may have some plausible force to yourself? For the sake of the general good, can you not sacrifice a point of comparatively little moment to you? By observing the rule in this respect, you would be an example which in its influence would be beneficial to many, and work out for the financial and spiritual well-being of the entire church with which you might be connected.

I would now say a word or two to those who have the willing spirit, but the weak flesh; whose hearts are disposed, but

whose purses are unfurnished. I think I am uttering the sentiments of every Methodist Minister and Leader, when I say *that paying money is not the condition of membership in the Methodist church*; that, if before God and your own conscience you deem yourself unable to give even a mite, you are welcome, heartily welcome, to the communion of saints as existing amongst us. The first object sought is the edification of your soul in piety, by the use of the Class-meeting; the other comes as one way of perpetuating and extending these meetings for the edification of other souls. God's cause will be sustained; and if He has not given you worldly substance, you cannot give of it. But there are those to whom He has given it; and to these He looks, and His church also, for *proportionate* contributions. My final observation on this general objection is, that you need not, you should not, you *must* not, allow the absolute non-ability to give keep you away from the fellowship of Christ's people. He does not debar you from His fellowship if you desire it; and God forbid that His church should throw a straw in the way of your coming into its fellowship!

MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTIONS.

I. "*There is sameness in the Class-meeting.*" This may be admitted; but the objection gains no strength by the admission. If the Class-meeting exposes itself to objection and neglect on this account, what shall we say of a multiplicity of things which are essential in the economy of life and religion? Is there not sameness in the food we eat, in the clothes we wear, in the houses in which we live? in the friends with whom we associate? But do we object to and neglect them on that ground? Is there not sameness in the Bible, in preaching, in prayer, in the Lord's Supper, in religion itself, nay, in Jesus Christ, who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" But what

devout mind renounces these things in his Christianity on that consideration?

While, however, there is sameness in the things to which I refer, the appearance and the effect of that sameness upon individuals depend very much on the condition of mind or body in which they may be found. A delicate appetite may complain of the sameness of the bread which daily comes on the table; but a healthy appetite will be grateful to see it and enjoy it as food. A man who feels prayer to be irksome will complain of its monotony; but he who loves it will feel it good to draw nigh unto God morning, noon, and night; although the same God, the same mercy-seat, and the same mode of prayer.

So with the Class-meeting: there may be somewhat of sameness in the way of conducting it, in the manner of speaking by the members, and in much of the experience which is spoken; nevertheless, if the mind is spiritual, and has an appetite for spiritual things, it will feed upon the spiritual bread which week after week may be supplied by the same hands.

I would not, by these remarks, be understood to favour or encourage the sameness of *death*, or of stagnancy, or of lukewarmness in the Class-meeting. No, verily. Let us have as little of this as possible. This sameness will end in corruption. The sameness to which I refer is that which is similar to the sameness of healthy life, wholesome bread, a well-read Bible, a much-loved Saviour, &c.;—a sameness like this, no devout heart, no spirit panting after God, will object to.

II. "*It tends to foster form in religious experience.*" In the first place, there must be form to religion as it exists among men, the same as there is a form to everything else. An object to be seen, imitated, and promulgated, must of necessity possess some form. This you grant, doubtless. Then, your objection, I suppose, refers to the tendency of the Class-meeting to foster form in the absence of power. Secondly, I observe that Class-meetings can have no more tendency to foster mere formal religion, than prayer, whether family, social, private, or public,

has to foster formal prayer alone; than preaching, to foster formal preaching without the power; than baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or any other means, to foster the form without the power. You may therefore as well object to these as to the Class-meeting.

It may not be denied that the Class-meeting is absolutely free from this tendency, any more than other means: but it is no more, nor even so much, an inherent element of it. It *is* in the nature of the Class-meeting to fan the flame of religion in the soul; to invigorate and enliven the spirit; in a word, to nourish the entire spiritual life. This it does, when used in a legitimate manner. And, I think, the real fact, if stated, would be that the Class-meeting, rather than *fostering* the mere form of religion, ascertains where it exists, and exposes it; the result of which is that the mere formalist either gives up this means, or seeks the power which it requires.

III. *The inefficiency of the Leader* is frequently urged against meeting in Class. That there are inefficient Leaders, just as there are inefficient Ministers, Local Preachers, Stewards, and Members, will be conceded; but this inefficiency may not exist so far as you imagine. You must not condemn large numbers for one; nor must you think that inefficiency in part implies inefficiency altogether. But, if you have not met in class, how can you judge of the Leader's inefficiency, any more than you can of a Minister's, whom you have never heard preach? Or, if you have met a few times, is that a sufficient trial? or, if you are resting your objection upon the judgment of some other person, is that manly, just, or Christian? or, if you are judging for yourself, is your judgment based upon experience, wisdom, charity? All these questions are very proper to ask in view of the point which you are raising.

But even were your objection received without any restriction or qualification, it would not exonerate you from the obligation to meet in Class. The Leader is not the Class, nor is the Leader the source of blessings in the Class, nor is he the only one from

whom we look for instruction and encouragement. He is a member of the Class the same as others, though called the Leader. We go to Class to edify one another in the relation of Christian experience, as much or more than to be addressed by the Leader. We go to sit before the Lord in the presence of each other, and wait on Him in holy meditation, prayer, and faith. We go to receive from Him the particular blessings which shall be suited to our several necessities. Now, cannot all this be done, even if it should be that a Leader is inefficient in certain points? The Class-meeting may thus be made a means of great good to us, irrespective of the educational or mental deficiency of the Leader, the same as the public worship of God, although the Preacher or Minister may be obviously wanting in many things which we may deem desirable.

IV. "*The Class-meeting is not so much needed now as in former times. Education and intelligence have become more general than they were. Religious books of every kind are now so plentiful and cheap that Christians can receive from these sources such religious instruction as they may require.*" Part of this objection may be all true, without in any way showing that the Class-meeting is not needed, or not needed so much as in the beginning of Methodism. It must not be forgotten, that religion, religious experience, the communion of saints, do not consist in education, in intelligence, in good books, or in the reading of them. However intelligence, education, books, &c., may increase and spread in the secular world in any of its departments, they do not obviate the necessity, or do away with the custom, of men meeting together in their various classes for secular fellowship. Nay, do not facts prove that as light increases in the different parts of the secular world, so its meetings increase and assume greater importance? If this is so in the secular world, should it be otherwise in the religious world? The increase of religious light and privileges ought to lead to the multiplication of times and occasions for the saints' fellowship, so that the fellowship

may be the richer, the deeper, the diviner, according to the increased light and privileges. And then as for the increase of secular light, that can never be an objection to Christian fellowship any more than it can be to conversion, to a holy life, or to an admission into heaven. That is altogether distinct from religious light and privileges. A man may bask in the sun-blaze of the light of this world, while he is buried in religious darkness, and cut off from every enjoyment of experimental Christianity.

The truth is, that the Class-meeting is as much needed this day as it ever was. As much as a separation from the world is needed, in some distinct form and organization; as much as a confession of Christ is needed; as much as the edifying of one another in love is needed; as much as the exhorting of one another, and the provoking of one another to love and good works, are needed; as much as brotherly affection, sympathy, concord, and confidence are needed; as much as unity in the church in her stand against sin, and in her efforts for the conversion of the world, is needed, so is the Class-meeting needed. Let secular light increase, religious knowledge abound, and all other external advantages to the church and the world, they will not, they *cannot* dispense with the immutability of truth, the authenticity of the Scriptures, the obligations of duty, the necessity of religion, the propriety of using all prudent means for its experimental and practical manifestation: they cannot dispense with the importance, the necessity, and the usefulness of Christian fellowship.

V. "*The Class-meeting encourages a religious gossip. Things which are spoken in it are often repeated again in other places, and repeated, too, in a way which is injurious to the persons concerned, and also injurious to the church.*" So far as your objection contains truth, and so far as that truth is applicable, it is deserving of the greatest consideration. But that religious gossip is encouraged by the Class-meeting is strongly denied. This is not in its nature or design. It is not patronized by Leader, Minister, or any

sincere Christian. If religious gossip is a feature of character in any one member, it is something of the "old man" not yet dead and destroyed in that member. It exists because of the lack of power in the spiritual life. It is practised despite the sacred influences of the Class-meeting. Such conduct is undoubtedly censurable in the highest degree. But do not on this account condemn the Class-meeting. Because a gossip lives in your neighbourhood, will you include all your neighbours in her company? will you attribute her failing to the neighbourhood, or to the general spirit and behaviour of the rest of the inhabitants? Certainly not. No; the Class-meeting does not encourage religious gossip, although there may perchance occasionally be found a member who indulges in it. So far as it exists, we confess that it is an evil, and requires a prompt and effectual remedy. In the absence of this, there may be times and circumstances when the prudent repetition of some peculiar religious experience, as uttered in the Class-meeting by a brother, may be productive of the greatest good to those to whom it is repeated. This, however, is widely different to the spirit and the object of the gossip.

VI. "*There are a great many untruths told in Class-meetings.*" It would, perhaps, be well for the person raising this objection to inquire how far he is uttering an untruth in making the statement; or to inquire whether he does not think as he says, because he has no experience which corresponds with that which is spoken in the Class-meeting. The objection implies that he who makes it is an attendant upon the meeting; if not, how does he know what is said? If he does not know what is said, how can he know that they who speak tell untruths? If he does know all that is said exactly and truthfully as stated by the members, then how can he affirm that they tell untruths, unless he is conversant with their lives and their hearts? I think only God, the Omniscient, can truthfully say whether there are untruths uttered in the Class-meeting. It is too much for any mortal to take upon him to say, unless he is prepared

with such clear, unequivocal, and undeniable evidence as will substantiate the accusation which he makes.

But were we even to admit that there may possibly be isolated cases in which there is not that rigid adherence to facts and feelings which is desirable, this is no fault of the Class-meeting. It is the fault of the individual himself who speaks. The Class-meeting requires candour, honesty, simplicity; and a departure from these is not by the influence of the Class-meeting, but the voluntary action of the person. The Class-meeting no more encourages the utterance of untruths than the family, the Lord's Supper, the pulpit, or public worship; but as these give no guarantee of unadulterated and perfect truth in every one related to them, so the Class-meeting gives no security that every one who belongs to it shall *never* deviate one iota from the absolute truth of things as involved in Christian life and experience. A security like this can be guaranteed nowhere and in nothing with which *man* has to do.

VII. "*You have only the poor and uneducated both as members and leaders connected with the Class-meeting.*" This is an objection which savours of the former in spirit and intelligence. A person to make an affirmation like this must certainly have visited Class-meetings very extensively, if not very frequently. But, at the same time, he must have been either partial in the Classes which he visited, or discriminating in the individuals whom he observed; for it is, after all that the objector says to the contrary, a notable fact that we have both the rich and the educated, who regularly attend this form of Christian communion.

Were we, however, in this objection, as in others, to admit its truthfulness, what follows? that Class-meetings are not means of grace adapted to the rich as well as the poor, and to the educated and intelligent as well as illiterate and uninformed? Would this be a sound conclusion at which to arrive? If so, then the same kind of logic would lead us to fearful conclusions in other things. When St. Paul teaches us, as in 1 Cor. i. 26-29, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not

many noble, are called," &c., must we conclude that Christianity is not adapted to the "wise," the "mighty," the noble?" To do so would be to contradict the nature of Christianity and the facts of its history in the world.

It must be distinctly understood as a doctrine of the Bible, and as a doctrine of reason in its views of Christianity, that mental attainments and circumstantial status do not constitute religion in *any* degree; and as they do not constitute religion, so they do not make the platform on which Christians meet before God, in the realization and expression of their experience in the Christian life. Christians have communion in faith, in hope, in joy, in zeal, in sympathy, in love, and all in Jesus; and not in educational acquirements or worldly circumstances. In these there may be the widest disparities, and in the others the closest affinities. In the one, the University may have been the fountain of education, and the palace the place of abode; and in the other, the common day-school may have been the source of instruction, and the cottage the home of the labourer. But in Christ Jesus, and in His fellowship, there is no difference; neither barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, circumcision nor uncircumcision, but all *sit together* in heavenly places in Him. It is related of the Duke of Wellington, that once when he remained to take the Lord's Supper at his parish church, a very poor old man came up and knelt down close by the side of the Duke. Some one (perhaps such as our objector) came and touched the poor man on his shoulder, and whispered to him to move further away, or to wait until the Duke had received the bread and the wine. But the keen eye and quick ear of the great commander caught the meaning of the touch and whisper. He took hold of the poor man's hand, and held him, to prevent him moving, and, in a reverential but distinct utterance, said to him, "Do not move; we are all equal here." So I would say of the Class-meeting; all are equal here. It is as much adapted to the rich lord as the poor peasant; and he could as well receive benefit from it while sitting by the side of his servant, as the noble Duke could receive good from the Lord's Supper

while kneeling by the poor old man,—providing he possessed the same Christian spirit, and exercised it in a similar way.

VIII. "*The Class-meeting is far from being what it used to be.*" Are you a member who make this objection? If so, may I kindly ask, Are you what you once were in the fervour of your love, in the warmth of your zeal, in the simplicity of your spirit, in the purity of your affections, in the self-devotedness of your life, in the regularity of your attendance upon the means of grace? I ask these questions because, if there is in the Class-meeting that difference which you observe, it is probably brought about by a difference for the worse in the experimental and practical points of religion to which I have adverted. The difference which you see may be only the reflection of your own experience. The Class-meeting is peculiarly and essentially what it is made by the spirit breathed into it from those who compose it. According to the kind of rays which blend, is the aggregate of light which shines; as is the degree of heat in the embers which make the fire, so is the body of heat given out. So in the Class-meeting: the kind of spiritual light, life, power, love, &c., possessed by the members, give tone and character unto it. If the blessed spirit which you think once pervaded the Class-meeting is not now so high, it has been kept down by the high pressure of worldliness or unbelief which has come upon the members. If former simplicity is wanting, it is because the rudiments of this world have swayed in too much power over the spirit, the language, the lives of the members.

But, my friend, suppose I admit that there are changes; I nevertheless believe that the scriptural essentials of Christian communion exist in the Class-meeting in general; and that the chief changes which have been brought about are those which are inevitable to the roll of time, the operations of Providence, the advanced state of mental and spiritual development, and those alternations which take place in the age of churches, as in the age of individuals and of nations.

IX. "*But, after all, there are many things needed to make the Class-meeting what it once was, or what it ought to be.*" There are some respects in which it were not desirable that the Class-meeting *should be* what it once was,—in those respects which arose out of, and were peculiar to, the times, persons, and circumstances to which you refer. Those peculiarities may be no more necessary now to the Class-meeting than the peculiarities in dress, in manners, in language, in building, of former times are necessary to England in the present age of her history. There are, however, in the Class-meeting of the past, things which it is most important to cherish now as much as then. Whatever can be discovered in the past of heavenly light, life, love, power, unity, emulation, peace, holiness, may well be maintained in the Class-meeting in our day. These are essential to its beauty, use, and the accomplishment of the ends of its institution; just as life, unity, power, and peace, are necessary to the existence of England in her governmental form and in the fulfilment of her high mission among the earth's nations.

As to the things that are needed to make the Class-meeting what it ought to be: First, let us see what the Class-meeting *ought to be*; viz., a meeting of Christians, or of those who desire to become such, for prayer, praise, exhortation; for the cherishing of mutual Christian affection, love, sympathy, confidence; for the incitement of each other to higher attainments in holiness, and to greater exertions in doing good; for the promotion of the universal peace, purity, power, growth, and glory of the church with which it is identified. Secondly, the things required to make the Class-meeting to answer this, supposing that in any case it does not, are corresponding Christian gifts and graces in those who compose the meeting. Let every member be diligent in attention to the private and public means of grace; let him live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit; let him lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset him; let him love the church of his choice as he loves his own soul, and love his brethren thereof as he loves himself; let him sympathize with the great Saviour in His plans of saving men, and co-operate

with His Ministers in their labours to fulfil the Saviour's purposes of mercy. Let this be something like the outline of life which every member shall aim at carrying out; and herein would be found the things that would make the Class-meeting all it "ought to be." Spiritual light would shine there, as the natural in the atmosphere when the sun goes forth in its strength; spiritual heat would glow, as the fire on the altar in the temple; spiritual love would reign, as it does among the white-robed members in the church of the first-born in heaven; spiritual peace would prevail as nature's peace, when "all things serve His sovereign will;" spiritual unity would be there, as there is unity among the armies of the holy ones before the throne; spiritual power would be there, as it is ever associated with spiritual unity, peace, love, fire, life; spiritual progress would be there, as an inevitable result of the whole.

If these things were features of the Class-meeting, it would be indeed what it ought to be. Thank God, the glory is not departed from the Class-meeting in these particulars. There are thousands of these weekly assemblies of Christ's people, which have some if not all the glory within them in the above respects. And I pray, too, that it may abide. But, brethren, is there not a need for the glory to increase? Are there not hundreds of Class-meetings, which, to speak figuratively, are in their location bordering upon the Arctic regions? They are cold, fruitless, comfortless, helpless, means to the church: there are wanting the chief elements of the Methodist Class-meeting, and the wonder is that they have maintained their being so long. Why should this be? There is no necessity for it. Every Class-meeting may be what we have said it ought to be, just as every Christian may live as he is directed to do in the Scriptures of truth. If the heart and life of the members of such Classes as are wanting in glory shall become right before God, it will be impossible for such to meet without realizing the comfort, the blessedness, the joy of the communion of saints.

I close my remarks with the prayer that the glorious King of Zion would visit every Class-meeting in Methodism throughout

the world with a baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire, and make it to its respective Society and Circuit the source of enlarged life, power, and progress. Amen.

The following hymns contain in such fulness and force the spirit which should ever pervade the Class-meeting, that I cannot refrain from appending them to what has already been said :—

SEE, Jesus, Thy disciples see,
The promised blessing give ;
Met in Thy name, we look to Thee,
Expecting to receive.

Thee we expect, our faithful Lord,
Who in Thy name are join'd ;
We wait, according to Thy word,
Thee in the midst to find.

With us Thou art assembled here ;
But O, Thyself reveal !
Son of the living God, appear !
Let us Thy presence feel.

Breathe on us, Lord, in this our day,
And these dry bones shall live ;
Speak peace into our hearts, and say,
“ The Holy Ghost receive ! ”

Whom now we seek, O may we meet !
Jesus, the Crucified,
Show us Thy bleeding hands and feet,
Thou who for us hast died.

Cause us the record to receive :
Speak, and the tokens show :
“ O be not faithless, but believe
In Me, who died for you ! ”

Two are better far than one
 For counsel or for fight :
 How can one be warm alone,
 Or serve his God aright ?
 Join we then our hearts and hands ;
 Each to love provoke his friend ;
 Run the way of His commands,
 And keep it to the end.

Woe to him whose spirits droop,
 To him who falls alone !
 He has none to lift him up,
 To help his weakness on :
 Happier we each other keep ;
 We each other's burdens bear ;
 Never need our footsteps slip,
 Upheld by mutual prayer.

Who of twain hath made us one,
 Maintains our unity ;
 Jesus is the Corner-Stone,
 In whom we all agree ;
 Servants of one common Lord,
 Sweetly of one heart and mind,
 Who can break a threefold cord,
 Or part whom God hath join'd ?

O that all with us might prove
 The fellowship of saints !
 Find supplied, in Jesu's love,
 What every member wants :
 Grasp we our high calling's prize,
 Feel our sins on earth forgiven,
 Rise, in His whole image rise,
 And meet our Head in heaven !

JESUS, united by Thy grace,
 And each to each endear'd,
 With confidence we seek Thy face,
 And know our prayer is heard.

Still let us own our common Lord,
 And bear thine easy yoke ;
 A band of love, a threefold cord,
 Which never can be broke.

Make us into one spirit drink !
 Baptize into Thy name ;
 And let us always kindly think,
 And sweetly speak the same.

Touch'd by the loadstone of Thy love,
 Let all our hearts agree ;
 And ever tow'rds each other move,
 And ever move tow'rds thee.

To Thee inseparably join'd,
 Let all our spirits cleave ;
 O may we all the loving mind
 That was in Thee receive !

This is the bond of perfectness,
 Thy spotless charity ;
 O let us (still we pray) possess
 The mind that was in Thee !

Grant this, and then from all below
 Insensibly remove :
 Our souls their change shall scarcely know,
 Made perfect first in love !

With ease our souls through death shall glide
 Into their paradise ;
 And thence on wings of angels ride
 Triumphant through the skies.

Yet when the fullest joy is given,
 The same delight we prove ;
 In earth, in paradise, in heaven,
 Our all in all is love.

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